

**ENCOUNTERING SEX EDUCATION AND IMAGINING POSITIVE SEX:
A DISCURSIVE EXPLORATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCOUNTS**

STEPHANIE MARGARET MURPHY

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore how young people constructed their experience of sex and relationship education in the school setting, and their expectations of sexual relations. A Foucauldian-informed discourse analytic approach was adopted to examine how discourses of sex and sexuality as deployed by young people are informed by material and social structures, social relations and institutionalised practices, particularly sex education as delivered in schools, and how this impacted on possible 'ways of being' open to young people. Of particular interest was how gender and power were implicated in the way young people constitute their sexual subjectivities, knowledge and practices.

A functional and transformative discourse related to sex was most dominant in the young peoples' talk, with young people constructed as enterprising subjects able to 'use' sex to achieve social success. Young people talked their sexual subjectivities into being within a social sphere that constructed sex as having real implications for their lived experience, but which was divorced from their embodied experience.

The findings of the research are discussed in relation to implications for clinical practice and future research. One of the most pertinent implications is the call by young people for a more complex understanding of their sexual and gender identity. Exploration of the wider issues pertaining to, along with the implications of, a range of sexual behaviours must be articulated and reflected upon in sex education lessons. Acknowledging the social, psychological, and emotional complexities of sexuality and sexual experience, as well as the physical, will enable young people to embody sexual subjectivities that genuinely reflect their complex lived experience, and provide space to recognise their strengths and resources in navigating sexual experience.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This study aims to understand the discourses that young people deploy to construct their expectations of sexual relations. Discursive constructions of sex and sexuality have implications for sexual practice - a given discourse has the power to legitimise or prohibit particular behaviour/practice. The discourses available to a population construct versions of reality as truth and variously position individuals within them. A growing body of research indicates that sexuality education in the United Kingdom de-sexualises young people, and is primarily risk-focused with a de-eroticised content. This narrow focus, critics argue, fails to take into account the diverse range of developmental trajectories young people are considering and living in relation to their sexualities. By disallowing space for understandings of sexual intimacy, pleasure, reciprocity, and desire, young people are being denied an essential aspect of what we know contributes to sexual well-being and development of positive sexual identity. This can impact on a person's understanding of their developing self, causing conflict that can have long-lasting psychological sequelae (Ingham, 2005; Milnes, 2010). In addition, by not recognising young people as sexual subjects, we are failing to acknowledge their competencies and resources around sexuality and sex behaviours, impairing their ability to navigate such experiences with a sense of agency, and, thus, safety. In this sense, it is essential to understand how young people are conceptualising their sexual and gendered identity, particularly in relation to SRE messages.

There is a significant body of research dedicated to understanding how young people understand and conceptualise their sexual and gendered identity, however, this is largely using retrospective accounts. This study aims to understand how sexual and gender identity is conceptualised and develops within the context of available discourses. It is therefore essential to explore the understandings and constructions of a younger adolescent cohort, as they are constructing their experience in relation to their developing sexualities. The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL) found the proportion of 16 to 19 year-olds reporting first sex before the age of 16 to be 30%

and 26% for men and women respectively (Wellings, Nanchahal et al. 2001). It is hoped that a more accurate account of 'developing' sexual and gender identity in situ, as it were, can be obtained by interviewing young people who are *considering* their emerging sexuality and beginning to construct those experiences. The dilemmas young people face, and subjectivities they are able to occupy, can be examined through their talk of current experience.

The gendered focus to understanding experience of developing sexualities is essential because of its centrality in influencing how sexuality is experienced (Tolman, Striepe & Harmon, 2003). Sex education has been criticised for the gender binaries that saturate the presentation of 'sex' to students. For example, the almost exclusive focus on coital sex reinforces a heteronormative sexuality that coheres around masculinity and penetrative actions (Jackson, 2010). The 'risks' of sex are firmly situated within a gender binary with the message to avoid pregnancy being overwhelmingly focused at female responsibility (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999). Therefore a focus on how young people are constructing their gender and sexual identity within the school system is principal.

1.2 Literature Search Strategy

The search strategy for the research was developed using an iterative process to ensure that high quality interdisciplinary literature was identified. Key concepts and terms were identified and used to create search strings that were combined to produce search strategies. Searches were conducted using Scopus, PsycInfo, MedLine, EBSCO Discovery Service, ProQuest, and the Cochrane Library search tools. Initial searches were made using combinations of key words: sex, sexuality, sexual intercourse, adolescents, teenagers, teens and young people. These key words formed a basis for all future searches. Additional searches were refined to include literature on: first sex experience; non-romantic sexual activity, predictors of first sex experience; family impact on first sex experience; sexual development; sexual safety; and sexual health. Research then moved on to accessing literature on: sexual subjectivities; constructions of first sex experience; young people's accounts of sexual experience and decision making. The searches at this point also included sexuality education; sex and relationships education; the impact of sex education; sex education in the UK,

public policy on sex education. The final searches focused on theory and methodology and used key word searches: researching sex; research in schools; feminist critique; queer theory; and Foucauldian methodology.

1.3 Sexuality Definition

Sexuality is a key concept within this thesis and is deployed in line with post-structuralist understanding of sexuality. Sexuality is encapsulated by Epstein, O'Flynn and Telford (2003) as:

‘...something much more broadly understood than simply ‘sex’ or ‘sexual relationships’. It is our promise that sexuality is not the property of an individual and is not a hormonally or biologically given, inherent quality. Rather sexual cultures and sexual meanings are constructed through a range of discursive practices across social institutions including schools. Thus, when we talk about sexuality we are talking about a whole assemblage of heterogeneous practices, techniques, habits, dispositions, forms of training and so on that govern things like dating and codes of dress in particular situations’.

The priority within this construction is that, although sexuality is experienced by subjects as personal and emanating from within, it is not individually produced. It is comprised of and warranted by relations of power (Weeks, Holland and Waites, 2003) and produced by social structures such as gender, class, age ethnicity and physical ability. These structures are hierarchical with some forms dominant and others subordinate. Conversely, socially constituted subjects are not without agency in the way that sexuality is ‘lived’ in corporeal and occupied realities (Bhaskar, 1989; Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willg, 2007). The very real effects of sexuality are imprinted on bodies and lives (Charania, 2009). The sexual agency afforded to and appropriated by young people is a key concern of this thesis.

Understanding subjectivity according to feminist post-structural theory is to position the self as the product of social, cultural and historical systems of representation (Butler 1990). Therefore, subjectivity is the way one understands oneself (Weedon, 1997) as represented by language. In this sense subjectivity is

a fluid process, constantly shifting and transforming in discourse with each act of speech, thought and behaviour (Butler, 1990). This understanding opens a world of transformative possibility for change: If subjectivity is constituted through 'externally regulated social practices' (Winckle, 2008: 34), it is therefore possible to alter the social practices to enable and produce alternative subjectivities (or subject positions). Through the medium of sex education, is possible to examine how gendered and sexual subjectivity is understood, and constructed, by young people, therefore opening up possibilities of change (Lather, 1991).

1.4 First Sexual Intercourse

The event of first sexual intercourse alone is not the most reliable predictor of sexual activity (Hawes, Wellings & Stephenson, 2010). Sexual behaviour of young people is comprised of a variety of behaviours which do not necessarily lead to sexual debut (Henderson et al., 2002). However, virginity, and first sexual debut, is an event of great personal and social significance (Mitchell & Wellings, 1998) which is marked by cultural and legal importance. First sexual intercourse, if unprotected, presents risks of unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection (STI) and is therefore a primary focus of SRE (the content and implications of which will be explored in subsequent sections). Consequently, it is pertinent to contextualise sexual debut statistics here; timing and circumstances of first sexual intercourse and experience in UK will be briefly listed. The primary source is a recent literature review of First Heterosexual Intercourse in the UK by Hawes, Wellings and Stephenson (2010) conducted by reviewing a total of 47 studies published since 1960 in English.

In terms of other adolescent sexual activity, research shows there is a sequence of behaviours that are relatively predictable; hugging and holding hands; to kissing and touching breasts/genitals over, then under, clothes; then to being undressed together; leading to coital activities such as oral sex and sexual intercourse (Hennessy, Bleakley, Fishbein, & Jordan, 2008). Waylen, Ness, McGovern, Wolke and Low (2010) used a computer assisted interview to ask adolescents aged 11-12 years (n=6,856) and 12-13 years (n=6,801) about romantic and intimate behaviours. It reported 17% of 11-12 year olds, and 32% of 12-13 year olds reported having been kissed on the mouth. Of the 12-13 year

olds: 2.1% of boys and 0.9% of girls had either been ‘touched/fondled private parts’; 1.2% of boys and 0.5% of girls had had oral sex; and 1% of boys and 0.3% of girls had had sexual intercourse. Therefore, those young people participating in this study are unlikely to have engaged in sexual intercourse, however may be beginning to explore their sexuality. This means the intention to understand young peoples’ sexual identity as it is *developing* should be borne out by the decision to interview a younger cohort aged 13-14.

The median age reported for first sexual intercourse is 16 (Wellings & Parker, 2006). NATSAL found the proportion of 16 to 19 year-olds reporting first sex before the age of 16 to be 30% and 26% for men and women respectively (Wellings, Nanchahal et al. 2001). A large multi-method study (Schubotz et al., 2004) found 27% of young people had sex before the age of 16, with 70% before the age of 17. These findings are corroborated by more recent surveys (e.g. Blenkinsop, Wade, Benton, Gnaldi & Schagen, 2004). There are trends in the timing of first sexual intercourse, with age of sexual debut falling in recent decades (Schubotz et al., 2004), although the numbers of women reporting first intercourse before the age of 16 has increased (Wellings et al, 2001). A gender differential is noted, with many studies (Blenkinsop et al., 2004; Currie et al., 2004) reporting higher proportion of girls having sex before age 16 than boys, although, not all studies corroborate this (Wellings et al., 2001). One English study (n=7,630) found girls were, on average, six months older at first sexual intercourse. This brief overview of adolescent sexual behaviours in the UK setting will hopefully provide a behavioural context for subsequent chapters that detail the subjective experience of young people.

1.5 Introduction Overview

This introduction will evaluate how young people, young people and sexuality, and sex and relationship education have been constructed by different institutions, material and social practices and social relations in the United Kingdom (UK). The first section will explore sex education and the pedagogy that informs it in the UK context. Constructions of young people and youth in a variety of contexts are then presented in order to demonstrate how they and their lives have been problematized by systems and practices in the UK. An overview of

Foucauldian concepts as applied to sex education is presented. Finally, a brief review of some key issues in the study of gender is offered. In each case, the contexts producing these constructions will be made explicit, and should be seen as interacting fields of knowledge, professional bodies and institutions, rather than separate and exclusive discursive planes.

1.6 Sexuality Education: The UK Context

The term sex and relationship education (SRE) is used throughout this thesis to refer to curriculum-based educational programs which focus on issues of sex, sexuality and sexual decision-making. Although the term does not describe the full range of attitudinal and behavioural factors addressed in SRE (Aldred et al., 2003; Epstein et al., 2003; Szirom, 1988) it is a conventional term that is widely used in education and health contexts and is, therefore, a useful description for this research.

There is an argument that school-based sex and relationships education offers a window of opportunity to improve young peoples' sexual health by developing competence (Hirst, 2008); increasing empowerment (Spencer, Maxwell & Aggleton, 2008; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2009) and encouraging personal qualities deemed necessary to navigate sexual relations in a "healthy" way (Markham, Lormand et al., 2010). In this context, the provision of sex and relationships education is regarded as essential to the development of 'mature' and 'responsible' attitudes towards interpersonal relations and social well-being (Aggleton & Crewe, 2005).

However, sex education constitutes a particular type of knowledge of sex and sexuality that is tied to assumptions about sex, youth, maturity and responsible behaviour. Mort (1987) examined the development of government intervention on sexual behaviour and revealed that sex education has been the subject of political controversy since the early 20th Century. A brief account of sex education development in the UK over the past thirty years will be offered here, but for detailed discussion please see reviews by Mort (1987), Thorogood (1992), Pilcher (2005) and Moore (2012).

1.7 Sexuality Education: A Brief History

The mid 1980's saw a shift from sex education taught in schools at the discretion of local authorities and head teachers (albeit guided by advisory publications from central government) to the establishment of a national statutory framework for the teaching of sex education in state schools. This was within a context of an AIDS epidemic (Thorogood, 1992) that required a national public health response, and a New Right government that feared sex education led by voluntary organisations that often promoted feminist, anti-racist and anti-homophobic ideals may encourage promiscuity and promote homosexuality (Durham, 1981). Sexual health education became centralised with Section 28 legislation that prohibited schools from promoting homosexuality (Holland & Thomson, 2010). Sex education provision in schools eventually became part of a 'programme of personal and social development led by teachers within the school rather than by outsiders' (Allen, 1987). The increased and centralised regulation of sexuality was met with a plethora of research, particularly from feminist and queer theorists that sought to make transparent the 'problem' of regulation, consequently problematizing gender and power inequalities (Thomson, 1994; Fine, 1988; Holland et al., 1994). A large gain made from this research was to make explicit the relationship between 'empowerment' and sexual safety. In their seminal work on young people, heterosexuality and power, Holland et al., (1998) suggested that gendered loss and gains of control are so entrenched in heterosexual sexualities that power inequality is rendered unrecognisable. This understanding of sexuality meant the ideas of 'choice' and sexual assertiveness were futile. Power operates between subjects (Allen, 2003a) and it is argued that the privileged position males hold in our patriarchal society can render gender relations unequal.

1.8 Sexuality Education: Current Pedagogy and Discourse

There is still little consensus regarding SRE content in the UK. It remains a highly political and controversial matter that serves as a site for political, moral and cultural struggles (Evans, 2006; Hirst, 2008) between central and local governments and between moral traditionalists and health campaigners (Monk, 2001).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) conceptualises sexual well-being as:

‘A state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being related to sexuality; not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be protected, respected and fulfilled ‘

(WHO, 2002)

This definition places emotional, social and psychological aspects of sexual experience as equal to physical and biological components in achieving sexual well-being. It highlights the importance of achieving pleasure and a sense of agency when engaging in sexual experiences. By explicitly stating that sexual health is achieved through active integration of the somatic, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of sexual being (and not simply by avoidance of problems) shifts the understanding of sexual health away from the risk-model championed by many SRE programmes (Thorogood, 2000) . The WHO (2002) suggests that for sexual well-being to be accomplished, the sexual rights of each individual should be considered and accounted for.

In the United Kingdom (UK), The Education Act 1996 states that the curriculum for all state maintained secondary and specialist secondary schools are obligated to provide sex and relationship education (SRE). However, the only compulsory elements of SRE are in the National Curriculum Science Order (National Healthy School Standard Team, 2001), which includes information on HIV, AIDS, sexually transmitted disease, and the biology of reproduction. This limited content appears inadequate to meet the WHO (2002) guidelines, which assert the integration of somatic, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of sexual being is essential for sexual health.

Non-statutory guidance for SRE offers a more comprehensive scope with the Department for Education and Employment Guidance on SRE (DfEE, 2000),

outlining a framework for Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE). This states the objective of SRE is to “help and support young people through their physical, emotional and moral development”. However, this non-statutory guidance is located within a document with a clearly defined moral framework that states: “Head teachers must ensure any sex education is provided in a way that encourages pupils to consider morals and the value of family life” (DfEE SRE Government Update, 2010) prioritising a heteronormative agenda. Current official guidance outlines three objectives of SRE (DfEE 2000). These have been succinctly summarised by Spencer, Maxwell and Aggleton (2008) as: a) to develop attitudes and values within a moral framework of ‘respect, marriage, and family life’; b) to develop the ‘personal and social skills’ of young people; c) to encourage the ‘informed decision’ to delay sexual activity and avoid unplanned pregnancy.

Thus, sex and relationship education is conceptualised in two ways: the first is statutorily imposed, adult-led and morally informed with a behavioural outcome focus (Spencer, Maxwell & Aggleton, 2008) that concentrates on the [negative] consequences of adolescent sexuality – unwanted pregnancy and disease. This conceptualisation utilises a discourse of conservative morality that positions adolescents as non-sexual innocents whose innocence must be maintained by avoidance of sexual knowledge (Monk, 1998).

The second conceptualisation incorporates a wider societal discourse of liberalism¹ which promotes health and success through a message of ‘empowerment’ (Jackson, 2010; Thorogood, 2000). Liberal curriculums also aim to prevent disease and unwanted pregnancy but utilise a discourse of risk and health (Hunt, 2003; Monk; 1998; Macvarish; 2010) and social exclusion (Ingham, 2005), which positions adolescents as vulnerable beings that must be “protected” from harm due to their ignorance and immaturity. Liberal programmes have been criticised for being heavily weighted toward contraception and disease prevention

¹ Jackson (2010) states: ‘The term liberalism encompasses a broad set of political philosophies around individual rights and equality but it is inflected with local meanings that may position it at any point on the conservative-socialist spectrum.’ In this thesis, liberalism is used to indicate a philosophy of individual rights, without necessarily suggesting progressive choice or freedom.

with an absence of topics such as pleasure, relationships and alternative sexual subjectivities (Allen, 2004; Kehily, 2004)

1.9 Sex Education as Regulation

These approaches both lay claim to knowledge about the “problem” of adolescent sexuality and represent truth claims (Monk, 1998; Rose & Miller, 1992). Both conceptualisations position young people as objects of teaching as opposed to sexual subjects with agency. As a result, moral-conservative and risk-averse discourses have remained dominant in the UK, conceptualising adolescent sexuality as a problematic and dangerous (Allen, 2007) entity that requires external regulation (Monk, 2001). In their account of sex education policy since the 1980’s, Lewis and Knijn (2003) document that current SRE is typically taught in the context of ‘risk’ behaviours such as drugs and crime. The assumption here is that sexuality (in relation to adolescents) requires ‘damage limitation’ (Hall, 2009). In 1992, Nicky Thorogood stated that sex education both constructed and confirmed categories of ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ which then regulated, monitored and controlled, an assertion that has been borne out in a raft of research in the intervening twenty years (Allen, 2005; Smette, 2009; Ingham, 2005). In particular Robinson (2012) highlights the strict regulation of children’s sexual knowledge through education. The moral conservative risk discourses are ratified by official government documents such as the Social Exclusion Unit’s (1999) report on ‘Teenage Pregnancy’, which emphasised the risk of social exclusion and material deprivation if young people engaged in sexual activity.

Competing economic, social, moral and health discourses on adolescent sexuality create a sex and relationship education that serves the powerful economic and social structures (Measor, Tiffin & Miller, 2000). Thus, sex education is a potent intersection of power-knowledge; simultaneously constructing and reproducing the social order (Thorogood, 1992). As such, sex and relationship education prepares people for crossing the sexual line but within a value-laden framework which espouses delayed sexual activity; avoidance of unplanned pregnancy; and extols the virtues of heterosexual marriage and family life. A fundamental feminist critique levelled at current sex education programmes draws attention to the gender binaries they produce through

discourses of 'choice' and 'empowerment' that are organised around heterosexual gender categories (Jackson, 2010). Such binaries reinforce heterosexuality and penetrative sex as 'natural'; working to constitute young peoples' developing sexual subjectivities within clearly defined categories of masculinity and femininity (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson, 1998). Research suggests schools act as sites for the production of sexual identities that are in line with the 'official' culture of school and which mark out specific and ratified sexual and gender positions (Allen, 2007).

1.10 Sexuality and Foucault

Thomson (1994) reviewed sex education in 1980's and 1990's Britain and highlighted a constant link between sex, disease and morality. It is argued that sex education urged self-discipline to prevent disease and / or 'inappropriate' moral behaviour and is seen as a shift in social control toward self-regulation (e.g. Monk 1998, Thorogood 2000). Foucault (1976, 1984, 1992) describes this shift in The History of Sexuality series where he asserts that the change from religious prohibition and physical punishment to scientific discourses of 'unhealthy' sexual conduct, meant that where one was previously subject to external constraints and repercussions, one is now required to self-discipline / regulate. Moore (2012) argues this self-regulation is a malignant force due to its effect on subjectivity. If, as Armstrong (1983) argues *'the body is the object par excellence of disciplinary power'*, with sexuality a key site for expressing this power then *'Sex Education is the formal expression of the training and disciplining of bodies'* (Thorogood, 1992: 44).

Sex education is considered to have an important role in the regulation of society: it is a technique of 'governance' (Foucault, 1979). Sex education is positioned as essential to produce 'sexually responsible individuals' (Measor, Tiffin & Miller, 2000). However, Plummer (1995) argues that it acts at a more fundamental level, constituting understandings of 'intimate citizenship'; that is, how one's most intimate decisions are shaped by (and in turn shape) our most public institutions such as legal codes, the medical system or the media. Sex education as delivered within the state school system is a site for modern forms of monitoring, regulating and the 'disciplining' of society (Thorogood, 1992). Indeed, Foucault

argued that sexuality is a principal site for social control in the 21st century. These Foucauldian concepts and terms will be explored in more depth in chapter two.

1.11 Discourses of Desire

A plethora of research has focused on young peoples' own experiences of sex and relationships and sex and relationship education (Fine, 1988; Thompson, 1990; Tolman, 1994; Allen, 2004; Ingham, 2005), which has revealed missing discourses of desire, diversity, erotics and sexual pleasure. In addition, research has demonstrated an absence of positive and non-threatening heterosexual subject positions for males to occupy (Allen 2004; Ingham 2005; Beasley 2008). Beasley (2008) notes that, despite the privilege afforded to heterosexuality, male sexuality is often constructed as uncontrollable and insatiable, with a lack of discussion around pleasure. This constructs male sexuality as dangerous and places it in the dominant position, which is restrictive for males as well as oppressive for females.

Few SRE programmes give space to sexual intimacy, pleasure and reciprocity. If equal space were provided to explore these aspects of sexuality (which one could assert are the basic drives behind sexuality) young people may develop greater acceptability with their own and others' bodies and sexual selves (Ingham, 2005). Exploring sexuality within this framework could produce a sense of agency, allowing young people the ability to acknowledge and communicate their own wishes and desires, positioning them as active agents in their sexual experiences. However, current discourses position young people as non-sexual or deviant which prevents any helpful conversations of how to navigate sexual experience in healthy positive ways (Scott-Sheldon & Johnston, 2006). For Ingham (2005), the emphasis in SRE should be in response to the diverse interests, experiences and needs of young people. This opens up an agenda of sexual possibilities giving the young person real choice. In sum, constituting young peoples' sexuality within a negative frame or rendering it absent makes it difficult for young people to occupy subject positions that are 'empowered'. Contradictory sexual identity discourses of 'non-'sexual' versus 'deviant' are simplistic, binary and disempowering.

1.12 Young Peoples' Response

Research shows that a significant percentage of adolescents are becoming sexually active younger than the law allows and that 'pre-marital' and 'underage' sex experience have become the norm for adolescents. 'Adults', that is, those with power over young people, such as parents, teachers and politicians have diverse responses to this picture of adolescent sex, which are often based on pre-existing morally and politically informed attitudes towards young people and sexuality. .

A large body of qualitative research has been conducted to examine how students engage in processes of meaning making about sexual identity at school (Kehily, 2002; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Allen, 2007; Epstein, O'Flynn & Telford., 2003) and there exists a tension between adult- and government-conceived content of SRE and young peoples' sense of what constitutes important content (Allen, 2008). Secondary school students in the UK, New Zealand and Australia have consistently critiqued SRE programmes as being introduced too late, including content that is not relevant to students' needs, and being perceived as overly scientific (Holland et al., 1998; Measor et al., 2000; Allen, 2005a).

Louisa Allen has conducted extensive research into young peoples' sexual subjectivity, devoting particular attention to how subjectivity is constructed within the sex education system in New Zealand. Her research indicates a *'gulf between schools' perception of student sexuality and young peoples' lived realities'* (Allen, 2007: 222). She argues that young peoples' critique of the current SRE programmes, positions them as 'sexually knowing and active decision makers' but that SRE serves to depreciate this knowledge and constitute them as naive and uncomplicated (Allen, 2005b). Measor et al. (2000) asserted that education about sexual health is likely to be most effective if educators take into account the current beliefs and practices of their target audience.

1.13 Neo-Liberal Subjectivity

As suggested above, current sex education programmes could be considered 'liberal' in that the aim is to reduce unwanted pregnancy, abuse and disease

through a message of 'empowerment' (Spencer, Maxwell & Aggleton, 2008), as opposed to overtly counselling the avoidance of pre-marital sex (Jackson & Weatherall, 2010). However, Walkerdine (2004) suggests that it is in fact a 'neoliberal' discourse at work that is producing a self-governing citizen who has the 'freedom' to make choices and, therefore, take responsibility for the consequences for those choices (Harris, 2004; Walkerdine, 2004).

The Department for Education and Employment Guidance on SRE (DfEE, 2000, 5) suggests that 'empowerment' supports young people to make 'informed choices', however, SRE policy is relatively clear about what the 'right' choices are (Spencer, Maxwell & Aggleton, 2008: 346). Hagquist and Starrin (1997) characterise the empowerment model as active and collective participation by pupils co-creating health education content facilitated by teachers. However, Kidger (2005) found little evidence of an 'empowerment model' in her analysis of English SRE policy, highlighting harm-reduction and moralism as dominant discourses.

A discourse of risk, and an education that focuses only on recognising and avoiding sex-related risk, places responsibility on the individual and effectively ignores the complicated and dynamic way lived experience is structured and mediated (Hunt, 2003). Shoveller and Johnson (2006) argue that this framework of SRE makes assumptions about the level of agency and control afforded to young people. The moral regulation theorist Alan Hunt (2003) terms this process 'responsibilisation' and argues risk is defined within a discourse of morals that serves to turn social problems into instances of individual failure. Powerlessness due to inequality of gender, race, class or ethnicity is obscured by a rhetoric that frames sexuality as a matter of prudent choice and self-control. Moore (2012) suggests this is an operation of discipline in the production of 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1979) creating a self-governing citizen.

SRE is conceptualised as a power to modify 'risky' behaviour through a technology of 'empowerment'. However, Spencer, Maxwell and Aggleton's (2008) investigation into the tensions between an empowerment pedagogy and a preventative pedagogy in SRE, show how an individualised 'empowerment'

approach ignores the 'places' in which young people's sexual relationships and experiences are negotiated. This approach to empowerment appears to equate perceived control with actual control, and gives little attention to structural constraints on young people's ability to exercise 'empowerment'. (Spencer, Maxwell & Aggleton, 2008). This effectively ignores the relations of power within these different contexts.

The neo-liberal subject is regulated not through the state but within a myriad of interrelated small-scale networks, where the individual has autonomy to effect perceptible and meaningful change (Foucault, 2008b). The successful neo-liberal subject is one who manages these diverse networks (such as employment, mortgage, pension, raising children) in the most 'responsible and prudent fashion', so as to succeed within the capitalist ideals. Therefore, regulation is not through limitation of individual freedoms, but through their multiplication (Miller & Rose, 2008) positioning the individual as autonomous and in control in an 'empowered' position to achieve what they desire. However, this autonomy is highly trained toward a goal of consumption and competition (Donzelot, 1979) and is, thus, contained within a strictly defined framework of inequality. This dynamic of 'equality of inequality' is what constantly stimulates competition and, therefore, maintains the boundaries of what is appropriate and inappropriate, as individuals constantly strive to improve the self.

1.14 Enterprising Self

In the western world, the value of the 'self', and in particular the production of a self that is performative and competitive (Marshall, 1996), is a fundamental principle of neo-liberal discourse that dominates in Western societies. The individual is required to produce a 'self' who is future focused (Fejes, 2008), a 'self' who understands one's life and identity as a type of enterprise (McNay, 2009). The production of such a self is now paramount and essential to 'success' as an individual. This conceptualisation of the 'citizen' (Sears, 1992) has filtered through into sexuality education policies post-1997 New Labour government (Monk, 2001). For example, Anita Harris (2005) argues that adolescent sexuality (particularly female sexuality) has always been monitored and regulated. Traditionally this was through discourses of 'violence, victimisation and individual

morality' (Fine, 1988: 31). Today young women are instead governed through discourses of 'empowerment' – where meaning is organised around making decisions about sex and taking responsibility for the consequences. However this fails to take into account other dominant discourse such as gender, power, race and social class that are intersecting with a discourse of empowered, rational sexual decision making. 'Freedom' to make sexual decisions too easily allows young women to be blamed, unsupported and marginalised for making 'bad' or 'wrong' decisions (Fine & McClelland, 2006). Work by Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, and Thompson (1998) has shown how dominant frameworks of masculinity and femininity operate to limit young women's control and autonomy in sexual relationships. This mode of government uses individual freedom as a form of power over individuals through the indirect regulation of social practices, and masked as personal autonomy and liberty (McNay 2009).

1.15 Gender Identity: Key Issues

A key aim of adolescence is generally defined as a stage in life course where one is driven to develop a clear sense of gender identity and to signal that identity to one's social world (Measor, Tiffin & Miller, 2000). Essentialist accounts of gender see it as biologically or psychologically determined, based on innate characteristics and following patterns that are comparatively universal (Baron-Cohen, 2003). In contrast, social constructionist accounts view gender as something that is produced in diverse and dynamic social contexts (Robb, Dunkley, Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2007). Gender identities are plural and diverse, what constitutes masculinity or femininity has changed over time, between societies, and between groups within any given society.

The idea that young people may have difficulty in understanding themselves as sexual subjects could be considered naïve in light of the highly sexualised youth culture that young people are exposed to and engage in (Levy, 2006). Sex education itself is premised on the fact that young peoples' sexuality is so vital that it necessitates increasing regulation (Pilcher, 2005). However, Allen (2005) argues that this conceptualisation of young people as sexual beings is not their own, but is the product of (adult) discourses which constitute adolescent sexuality as 'requiring restraint' (Allen, 2005: 64). For those young people who do not

identify with these constructions, taking up a subject position as sexual is problematic (Allen, 2005). Young people are, therefore, offered limited subject positions. Also the messages propagated by SRE may not be appropriated by young people who feel their lives are not being described.

Sex education is, therefore, important in 'socialising a new generation' not only into prevailing attitudes about sexuality but also into ways of understanding oneself and one's place in society, particularly in terms of gender (Measor, Tiffin & Miller, 2000). Sex education plays a crucial part in the individual's self-regulation and facilitates deeply felt emotions about identity and self in the world. A fundamental criticism by feminist authors has been that the promotion of risk, danger and victimisation around sex has served to silence female desire (Fine, 1988; Tolman, 1994; Ussher, 2005) and, therefore, full subjectivity and agency. Butler (1990) and McNay (2009) discuss the importance of embodied agency through discourse. They assert that performing according to discourses does not exclude agency – but produces it. The repeated 'inscription' of symbolic norms through performativity produces a stable subject who also has the capacity to resist constructions. In the process of doing this, marginalised and dominant constructions of sex are embodied (Bryant & Schofield, 2007). A young woman's experience of herself as a subject with agency in any realm is highly dependent upon her construction of herself and her identity. Sex and gender are irrevocably and intimately linked and are pervasive in the constitution of one's identity

Feminist sociologist and psychoanalyst Nancy Chodrow argues that development and signal of male identity requires performance to indicate that they are not female. She asserts that the way boys act to achieve manhood is by 'devaluing and attacking things that are feminine'. Arnot (1984: 53) states that *'Masculinity, in all its various forms, is not the same as femininity – it is after all a form of power and privilege'*. However, Connell (1995) has been influential in shifting attention away from the idea of masculinity (and, therefore, femininity) as singular and universal to thinking of multiple masculinities that are plural and socially situated; although a dominant hegemonic ideal of masculinity as heterosexual, virile and dominant persists.

It is suggested by Anita Harris (2005) that the 'new' discourses of desire of 'empowered' young women reproduce hegemonic heterosexual relations, such as splitting of sex and romance, and the obsession with display and the male gaze (Holland et al., 1988), perpetuating gender inequality. The neo-liberal idea of autonomy and empowerment has become bound with the feminist message that females are sexual subjects (Harris, 2005). Within a problematic context of consumerism (Griffin, 2004a), females are now produced as desiring subjects and desirable objects in popular culture. Fine and McClelland (2006) observe that *'a caricature of desire is now displayed loudly, as it remains simultaneously silent'*.

1.16 Conclusions

A growing body of research indicates that sexuality education in the United Kingdom de-sexualises young people, and is primarily risk-focused with a de-eroticised content. Furthermore, critics argue that the current sex education curriculum is heteronormative in emphasis and involves moral underpinnings that endorse marriage and family values as paramount. This narrow focus, fails to take into account the diverse range of developmental trajectories young people are considering and living in relation to their sexualities. From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, sex education has always been a site of power and governmentality (Youdell, 2004; Rose, 2000). This has propagated knowledge 'truths' about sexuality and constructed people according to these 'knowleges'. Taking Foucault's perspective on institutions of power – sex education has been used as a technology of governmentality to serve the powerful institutions' wants and needs by regulation of the population (Winch, 2005; Luksik et al., 2010, Hook, 2005; Rose & Miller, 1992). This results in the powerless in society being subjugated, in this instance young people, and within that young women, to fit with political and economic requirements of a particular time (Luksick et al., 2010; Youdell, 2004).

Therefore, if one takes the feminist post-structuralist perspective, as outlined above, it can be accepted that sex education is reflective of the powerful structure's (such as government) needs at a given time (Youdell, 2004; Rose,

2000; Luksik et al., 2010). Thus, in the economic climate of today, where the threat of a population dependent on the state is a populist idea propagated in the media, a discourse of 'enterprising self' is insidious and achieves self-regulation through a discourse of 'empowerment'. This discourse ignores structural and gender inequality, pathologising those who fail to succeed within ratified versions of femininity and masculinity, without acknowledgement of issues of class, race or gender.

This study aims to understand how expectations of sexual experience are constructed by young people, when there appears to be a narrow and heteronormative account of sexuality, in current sex education programmes in the UK. By disallowing space for 'positive' understandings and conceptualisations of sexual intimacy, pleasure, reciprocity, and desire, young people are being denied an essential aspect of what we know contributes to sexual well-being and development of positive sexual subjectivity and, thus, agency. Such restricted knowledges can impact on a person's understanding of their developing self, whereby "thin" or simplified versions of self emerge that are inadequate in accounting for the varied emotional, physical and psychological experiences that adolescent sexuality presents. It is suggested here that the juxtaposition between experience and 'knowledge' can cause long-lasting conflict to the young person's developing sense of self. Meaning that young person's ability to negotiate sex from a knowing position and one of embodied subjectivity and, thus control, would therefore be severely compromised. The implications for sexual practice and alternative approaches to sexual education will be explored within this thesis.

1.17 Research Aims

The primary aim of this research is to explore the discourses that young people deploy to construct their expectations of sexual relations, and to consider how the discourses of sex and sexuality as deployed by young people are informed by material and social structures, social relations and institutionalised practices, particularly sex education as delivered in schools. The secondary aim is to examine how gender and power are implicated in the way young people constitute their sexual subjectivities, knowledge and practices.

- Identify and examine the young peoples' discursive constructions of sex and relationship education (SRE).
- Examine and discuss the effect of the SRE discourses and teaching practices, as constructed by the young people, on emerging sexual and gender identities.
- Identify and examine how young people construct their expectations of sexual relations and consider the possibilities that are opened or closed due to the available discourses of sex and sexuality.

The approach to this study has been influenced by the ontological, epistemological and methodological principles of feminism and post-structuralism. Post-structuralism is sceptical of universal or objective truths that provide unified accounts of complex social phenomena (Allen, 2005) instead suggesting that knowledge is 'socially constituted, historically embedded and valuationally based' (Lather, 1991). The epistemological position and methodological principles are explored in more detail in chapter two.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the epistemological position adopted in this study, that of feminist post-structuralism, and explains why the philosophical assumptions of this position warrant the method of analysis utilised. Methodologies proposed by Foucault are outlined and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) is introduced as the approach to answer the research questions. The specifics of the research procedure are elaborated upon. The chapter closes with a discussion of the quality criteria used to evaluate this research.

2.1 Epistemological & Ontological Position

Epistemology, methodology and method should provide a congruent framework for addressing the research question (Carter & Little, 2007). Silverman (1993:1) distinguishes between methodology as “a general approach to studying research topics’ and method as a ‘specific research technique”. Harper (2012) and Carter and Little (2007) argue that methodology should be shaped by epistemology. This research adopts the epistemological position of feminist post-structuralism

Post-structuralism proposes that meaning is made through the use of language by people in interaction, and that reality is not merely reflected through language but constituted and produced by language. It is, therefore, essentially sceptical of universal knowledge claims about reality and focuses on how knowledge is generated through language and discourse (Gergen, 1985). It is, furthermore, concerned with why some claims about reality are accepted as more legitimate than others, taking the position that all “truths” or “knowledges” use single quote marks when not actually quoting in order to communicate their constructed content or truth situated in, and produced by, their social, historical and cultural context (Harper, 2012).

A post-structuralist perspective foregrounds discourse and language as the prime site of the construction of the person and identity. Gergen (1985) suggests that a person is not one self but operates through different selves, creating voices to influence relationships around them dependent on context. People who are either actively or implicitly involved in an interaction are always in the process of

constructing and reconstructing themselves (Burr, 2001). Within this understanding the self the subject is in constant flux and constantly changing depending on who is in the social interaction and context, and what the purpose is. Sense of self or identity is, therefore, understood as being fragmented, shifting and temporary. The subjective feeling of coherence and continuity is being constantly negotiated and re-negotiated into different meanings. Burr (2001) states that meaning-making through discourse and language is a site of variability, disagreement and potential conflict. Conflict inevitably means power relations: if talk, writing and social encounters are sites of struggle and conflict, then they are sites where power relations are acted out and also contested. This approach implies that the subjective understanding of (sexual) identity available to young people will be strongly influenced by the relationships they have with their teachers, peers and the SRE curriculum, and will be influenced by how each of these social groups and social practices construct young people (and their sexualities).

This understanding of self and identity is in direct contrast to humanism, which assumes that there is a unified, coherent and unchanging core of the individual. Humanism is essentialist and assumes that the person is a rational agent and author of their own experience and meaning: '*it originates within the person, in their essential nature*' (Burr, 2001: 54). 'Essential nature' here refers to a number of things, such as personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, femininity and so on, which are assumed to be stable features, inherent to the individual. Essentialism predicts that an object will, largely, fulfil its predetermined course of development in line with essential characteristics (Kanovsky, 2007). Within education, an essentialist understanding of the individual, their ability to learn and use information prevails. The primary function of education is to produce a performative and competitive subject (Marshall, 1996); one who is future focused (Fejes, 2008) and understands their life and identity as a type of enterprise (McNay, 2009). As discussed in chapter one, this essentialist understanding of the individual has largely influenced how SRE is conceptualised and delivered in the UK. Essentialism is the dominant societal epistemology in the UK and as such has a heavy influence over how we understand ourselves and others. Taking a critical perspective such as post-structuralism, which believes identities

and selves are constructed dependant on time and place, means those concrete and unchanging structures of being, assumed stable by essentialism, are rendered changeable and fluid across contexts. This conceptualisation creates space for alternative ways of being to emerge, rather than within contained categories, such as 'introvert' or 'aggressive' or 'feminine'

A fundamental task of feminism is recognised as a commitment to problematizing unjust gender relations and inequality. Problematizing brings to consciousness that which has been accepted without question, thereby creating space to notice, acknowledge and, ultimately, transform inequality and injustice. This task presents a dilemma when working with post-structural tools which typically divorce 'objective truth' and 'neutrality' from phenomena being observed. As such, it is argued that the realities of gendered lives cannot be fully accessed or evaluated. Parker (2002) argues that taking a purely relativist post-structuralist position within discursive psychology undermines critical evaluation, by denying the ability to take up any position from which a critique can be fostered. A purely relativist approach renders moral choices and political allegiances against gender inequality impossible. Also, importantly for this work, a purely relativist position is inadequate for discursive accounts of the material body and embodied subjectivity (Burr, 1999). As the aim of this research is to explore young peoples' constructions and understandings of a sex education curriculum at a particular secondary education institution, it is essential to consider how the practices, routines and regulations that comprise the school system can limit and delimit constructions. The social constructions of young people's identities, sexualities, sex and gender have 'real' material effects on their bodies, identities and life experiences.

To this end, a critical realist stance is adopted when approaching the analysis. Similar to a post-structuralist position that foregrounds discourse and language as the prime site for the construction of the person and identity, the closely aligned critical realist perspective views language as constitutive and performative, while not occluding the 'real' and material effects of the discourse as a more relativist position has been criticised for doing (Burr, 2005). Parker

(2001), and others adopt a post-structural position that can be defined as ‘critical realist’:

“This orientation pays attention to the material, physical and social bases of behaviour, without neglecting the social nature of our interpretations and theories” (Parker, 1997: 302)

In critical realism, constructions of social reality are seen as “*constrained by the possibilities and limitations inherent in the material world*” (Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig, 2007). The ontological implications of this position assume that material practices and conditions offer a range of possible ways of being, which are then adopted by the individual (Willig, 1999). Our ways of constructing the world are, thus, seen to be mediated by context.

The critical realist stance of this research, therefore, holds the assumption that there are multiple realities constructed by language and these constructions are shaped by material conditions. Qualitative methodologies are concerned with meaning; allowing for diverse and rich descriptions to be gathered with a focus on the subjective experience of participants. A critical realist post-structuralist epistemology is therefore congruent with qualitative methodologies due to their acknowledgement of the range of possible experiences and appreciation of the context specific nature. Furthermore, the consideration of subjectivity afforded by qualitative methodology is particularly relevant when working with young people; a population whose identity is recurrently constructed by others (including media, government and health organisations) often vociferously and homogenously.

2.2 Foucauldian-Informed Discourse Analysis

Burr (2001) suggests ‘discourse analysis’ is a term used to describe a range of research practices to the study of language with varying aims and theoretical underpinnings. Discourse analysis (DA) examines language ‘in use’ (Avdi & Georgaca, 2009) rather than examining language as a means to access ‘underlying’ psychological phenomena such as attitudes, memory or emotions. As such, language is considered performative; constructing reality rather than mirroring it, and as a form of social action enabling various subject positions,

actions and practices to be appropriated by the speaker. By paying close attention to the constructive and functional dimensions of discourse, DA asks: 'How is participants' language constructed, and what are the consequences of different types of construction' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 55).

DA can be usefully divided into two key approaches (Willig, 2001; Harper, 2006) Discursive Psychology (DP) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). DP takes a 'micro' level approach and focuses on discursive practice such as rhetorical devices and their use in managing social interactions; for example, to 'persuade, justify and excuse' (Langdridge, 2004). FDA performs a 'macro' level analysis and is less concerned with the immediate interactional context. FDA focuses on discursive resources; how ways of talking about an object, event or experience is mediated by, and located within, the historical, cultural and institutional context. FDA, therefore, examines the discursive worlds people inhabit, what kinds of objects and subjects are created through discourse, and ultimately what kinds of 'ways of being' these objects and subjects make available to people (Willig, 2001: 91).

Foucauldian informed discourse analysis (FDA) is an on-going development of the work of philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault's understanding of discourse was that discourse constructs the topic, defining and ultimately producing our knowledge of things. However, Foucault did not deny the existence of a non-discursive realm (Kendall & Wickham, 1999), acknowledging that material realities (e.g., bodies) do not exist in a discursive vacuum. Foucault's 'discourse', therefore, is not simply the construction of objects, subjects and experiences through language, but is in fact a whole system of practices and materialities that mediate and accommodate constructions. This understanding of 'discourse' resonates with the critical realist stance taken in this study, whereby material practices are 'given an ontological status that is independent of, but in relation with, discursive practices' (Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig, 2007).

Allen (2005) notes that within sex and relationships education programmes and the school system in general, potentially 'empowering' constructions of young people and their developing sexualities are marginalised in favour of

pathologising constructions. The implications for such constructions have been explored in the literature (e.g. Fine, 1988; Tolman, 1992; Allen, 2007), however, this is usually with older cohorts of young people who are already engaged in sexual activity. This research will explore the way in which dominant discourse about young people and sex serve to legitimise or prohibit particular behaviour or practices; including the actions and subject positions available to young people.

There is no formulaic method to “doing” FDA (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008) and many authors have reminded those utilising the approach to remember it is a Foucauldian *informed* Discourse Analysis. ‘Informed’ because Foucault performed a discourse analysis that was primarily genealogical, or historical, in flavour (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). Foucault’s more historical analyses of sexuality and madness, for example, have been subsequently used as a methodological framework for qualitative analysis of the productivities and regulations of language and discourse but without the same historical emphasis – that is why we say Foucauldian informed discourse analysis. Foucault himself stated:

‘I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area’ (Foucault, 1974)

In my analysis of young peoples’ constructions of their emerging sexual identity within the school education system I am aligned with a Foucauldian approach in my analytic concern with embodied experience (e.g. sexual desire), the power of institutional practices (e.g. the government directed curriculum delivered through a state school), and materiality (e.g. access to contraception). Some Foucauldian concepts are considered in more detail below.

2.2.1 Knowledge-Power

According to Foucault (1976) in the History of Sexuality Volume One, what we think we ‘know’ about at any one particular period, for example, adolescent sex, has a bearing on how we regulate and control behaviour and practice associated with adolescent sex. In this sense ‘knowledge’ is, therefore, a form of power as it

assumes the authority of 'truth'. By knowledges being performed as 'truths', knowledge has the power to make itself true. In this sense, knowledge as truth is productive and powerful. Knowledge and knowledge-truths are used to regulate conduct by constraint, regulation and disciplining practices, and also resistance. Power relations permeate all levels of social existence and, as such, are therefore, operating at every site of social life. In the private realm of sexuality, as much as in the public realm of the education system, power circulates and is constantly negotiated and re-negotiated. Therefore:

'There is no power relation within the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations' (Foucault, 1977: 27)

Foucault's emphasis on power and resistance is of great importance when considering a marginalised and pathologised group such as adolescents (Allen, 2007). Carbine (2001) states that it is possible to use Foucault's techniques of genealogy to create a "snapshot" or window of a particular moment without the need to resort to tracing the full history and that it is still a valid, relevant and useful technique for interrogating power/knowledge in a discourse.

English and Irving (2008) give an overview of the four primary components of Foucault's theory of power (1977) as: a) power is pervasive and operates at every interaction level; b) power is not absolute, where there is power there is resistance, explicitly or implicitly, such as resistance by silence; c) power operates through disciplinary practices or techniques that produce self-surveillance; d) finally, power is always productive, because of the continual dynamic relationship with resistance, power is not repressive in the traditional sense.

Governmentality (Foucault, 1980) is the political exercise of power from a distance. This conceptualisation of power sees it as regulating individuals, directing and guiding them to perform in certain ways by structuring their immediate environment, rather than by the use of force or direct control (Foucault, 2003i: 138-139). People are given control over multiple diverse social

networks, over which they have the autonomy to make meaningful choices and decisions (McNay, 2009). In this way, they come to manage their own conduct and that of others in apparently voluntary ways. McNay (2009:56) notes that *'Foucault remarked frequently in interviews that neoliberalism is an exemplar of the indirect style of social control, the conduct of conduct, that typifies governmental reason.'*

2.2.2 Technology of Self

Rose (1996: 26) stated that 'technologies of power' refer to *'any assembly of practical rationality governed by a more or less conscious goal'*. Foucault refers to such techniques as 'technology of the self', which refers to practices that bring about a certain mode of existence, a certain form of subjectivity. In this context, 'technologies of power' are considered as institutional practices acting on men to govern their conduct and influence the constitution of their identity. Technologies of the self are the various 'operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being' that people make either by themselves or with the help of others in order to transform themselves to reach a 'state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault, 1988:18). In this sense constructions of self are constituted through certain discursive and material practices that are designed to exercise power over individuals.

2.3 Procedure

Three focus groups, each comprised of five to six participants, were facilitated to generate data to guide the semi-structured interview schedule. Data generated by focus group discussions were then analysed to generate a valid semi-structured interview schedule (Epsin, 1999: 228). Upon reading relevant literature and consulting with my Director of studies and Field Supervisor, the Focus Group (FG) questions were constructed.

Ten individual interviews were then conducted with six female and four male participants. The interview data were subsequently analysed by employing the method of discourse analysis informed by Foucauldian principles. In analysing the data, I followed a series of steps adapted from Parker (1992) and Willig (2001) and utilised a number of analytic questions from Potter and Wetherell

(1987) and Parker (1992). A full description of analyses, together with a breakdown of the analytic steps taken, will be discussed in future sections.

2.3.1 Ethical Approval and Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought and subsequently granted by the UEL ethics committee (Appendix A). The research was registered with Camden and Islington Research department and UEL Research board. NHS ethics was not required as it was a non-clinical sample. Within the school, the head teacher, head of pastoral services and head of SRE, evaluated the research protocol and information sheets. They also required a copy of my Criminal Records Bureau check. The head of SRE was very supportive of the research and stated her interest in developing the SRE programme within the school. She explained that as the head of SRE she had authority to deliver the programme as she saw fit, provided the pastoral service felt the content was appropriate.

In view of the pastoral services involvement in SRE development, and considering the PHSE aims to 'promote the moral development' to 'develop [them] as citizens'. I was conscious of the 'anonymous gaze' (English & Irving, 2008) of the statutory education system and the views I was aware they promoted in relation to sex education. This presented a key ethical issue for me: my reading of the literature into sex education had led to development of ideas about the regulatory practices of the education system in 'controlling' adolescent sexuality (Thorogood, 1992, 2000). Implicit within the research aims was the task of tracing any power relations and regulatory practices featured in the young peoples' experience of SRE and their developing sexuality. As such, I did not want to collude with a system that positions young people as unknowing, incompetent, or vulnerable and in need of protection (Allen, 2009; Tolman, 2002). I wanted to provide a safe open space for young people to discuss their experiences without fear of judgement or repercussions, which is reported as a frequent response for young people when asked to discuss issues of sexuality by adult researchers (Burman, 1994; Weedon, 1987). However, I also felt a strong ethical obligation to protect the young people who were particularly young in terms of participating in research into sex and sexuality and who were in fact under the legal age of consent for sexual intercourse.

To address this, brief case vignettes of fictional young males and females who are thinking about sex and sexuality were provided to initially stimulate conversations, both in focus groups and interviews (see appendix B and C respectively). They served to depersonalise the discussions as young people were asked to hypothesise what the fictional character might be thinking/feeling and why that is, as opposed to discussing their own experiences. This approach was satisfactory for all stake holders in the research. Importantly, it would put the young people in a position of 'safety' (Carey, Walther & Russell, 2009) enabling them to discuss aspects of sexuality without taking ownership of the behaviour or belief. This approach would also accommodate the considerations of the ethical committee at university and also the 'anonymous' ethical statute in the school system who were concerned with the protection of the young people. This method of de-personalising stake (Edwards & Potter, 1992) worked particularly well in the focus group setting, where most conversation was stimulated and sustained by the use of the case vignette. In one to one interviews however the young people often relinquished the fictional characters, frequently lapsing into personal stories. They explained that they felt more able to do this in the confidential interview settings.

It was hoped that discussion of sexual health issues would be informative and empowering for participants, but it was also anticipated that some participants may have found discussion of sexual health and sexuality difficult, embarrassing or upsetting (Burman, 1994; Weedon, 1987). Some participants may have wished to disclose and discuss sexual abuse or other harm. To address such considerations, before the discussions began, the legal limits of my capacity as researcher were outlined and confidentiality agreements were fully explained, including times when confidentiality would have to be broken. This included citing the "Working Together to Safeguard Children" legislation, which stipulated social services or other agencies would be contacted if a person under 18 disclosed that the health, safety or welfare of themselves or others is at grave risk (Department for Education and Skills, 2006). Nonetheless, young people were encouraged to seek help for themselves, rather than disclosing information against their will. Relevant agencies for young people to contact were provided

to all young people (see appendix D) for example local GP or sexual health clinics, helplines, advice, and guidance organisations.

Ground rules were collaboratively developed with the young people, examples of which can be found in appendix E. During the focus groups it became clear that this was a sensitive topic of conversation. Talk was very limited at first, only responding to my questions. Some young people were quieter than others and this was respected within the group, having the ground rules was very helpful. Using Michael White's ideas of "absent but implicit" (Carey, Walther & Russell, 2009) helped me to think about what their relative quiet was communicating. To explore this, those young people who were quieter were invited back to individual interviews.

2.4 The Study

2.4.1 The Participating School

This study aimed to understand young peoples' accounts of sex and relationship education (SRE) and their emerging sexualities, thus, a non-clinical sample was used. I was particularly interested in young peoples' experience of SRE, therefore, participants recruited from a school were deemed most appropriate. However, this did present some epistemological issues as the school environment could reproduce and reinforce inequality between the participants positioned as school children and myself as an adult researcher. These issues will be reflected upon further in chapter four.

Professional colleagues of the researcher with links to a state-funded secondary school within London provided introduction to the head of SRE at a relevant school. The head of SRE was contacted by telephone to discuss the study. At this point the head of SRE expressed an interest in improving the school's current sex education programme. She felt that participating in the study was a way of considering an alternative approach and, therefore, agreed to the research being conducted at her school. I consequently sent a letter to the head teacher and head of SRE formally detailing the research project. They reviewed and

approved copies of the Information Sheet (see appendix F), Parental Consent Form (see appendix G), and Participant Consent Form (see appendix H) and gave formal consent for the research to go ahead.

The participating school is a state-funded comprehensive based in an urban area of Outer-London. The school is co-educational and at the time of data collection provided for 1602 students, 345 of whom attended Sixth Form. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is similar to that found nationally. The proportion that are from minority ethnic groups is greater than the national average, as is the proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational needs. The school has specialist status in Music and the Performing Arts and has been awarded a grade of 3 'satisfactory' (where 1 outstanding and 4 is inadequate) by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). A methodological decision was taken to centre young peoples' views in this research (Kehily, 2007). Until the 1980's young peoples' experiences were accessed through adult conduits (France, 2004), in order to gain richer insights into young peoples' lives it was decided that SRE content would not be formally evaluated and young people would provide the only account of it (Valentine, 1999). However it is pertinent to describe the SRE context and so a brief overview is provided here.

Sex education is compulsory in the school from year nine through to year eleven. Sex education was delivered within Personal Social Health and Economic (PHSE) education lessons. These hour-long lessons were delivered once every two weeks by form tutors to form-class groups and covered: similarities and diversity among people; impact of discrimination and prejudice; loss and bereavement; drug use; sexual activity and relations; contraception, pregnancy and sexually transmitted 'diseases'. The school described the ethos behind PHSE as:

'PSHE programme aims to promote the moral, cultural, mental and physical development of each pupil as an individual. It prepares the pupils

for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life and enables them to develop as citizens. ‘

(PHSE Student Handbook, 2010/2011)

Within the handbook for year nine students, eight pages are dedicated to SRE: two entitled ‘Sex and the Law!’ detailing legal conditions for sex in the UK. Two pages were dedicated to contraception, one listing very brief descriptions of each method, which included ‘the calendar method’ and ‘saying no’. The second contraception page was a worksheet for young people to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each method. Three pages gave very detailed descriptions of sexually transmitted infections (STI’s). This was the most comprehensive section of the handbook and listed name of infection, signs and symptoms, how it is transmitted, the ‘treatment’ and the consequence if left untreated. The final page was a ‘My rude words word-search,’ which was blank for young people to design their own.

2.4.2 Participants and Inclusion Criteria

The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL) found the proportion of 16 to 19 year-olds reporting first sex before the age of 16 to be 30% and 26% for men and women respectively (Wellings, Nanchahal et al., 2001). This study aimed to understand how sexual and gender identities are conceptualised and developed within the context of available discourses and, thus, it was essential to explore understandings of a younger cohort as they are developing, as opposed to retrospectively. As a result, young people at Key Stage Three, specifically those in Year Nine, who were aged thirteen to fourteen, were selected for participation. The study anticipated a range of accounts from young people irrespective of their gender and sexual identity, where the latter was known to the young person. So as not to reify or essentialise sexual categories and identities particularly at this early stage of development, participants were not required to identify as heterosexual or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ).

Participants were self-selected in response to the following:

- Young people must have been engaged in SRE for at least six months prior to participation.
- Letters were sent to parents / guardians of all 183 Year Nine students explaining the rationale for the study and its procedure and requesting consent to allow the young person opportunity to participate (appendix G). Parents were required to “opt-in”.
- The young people whose parents consented were then provided by the researcher with information verbally and in written form detailing the research and given time to reflect whether they wanted to participate or not (appendix F).
- They were given the option to participate in a focus group session and/or one-to-one interview. Those agreeing to participate were asked to sign a consent form (appendix H).

Although the school were happy to frame the study as “opt-out”, as per their usual procedure, I felt this was likely to mean many of the participating young people would not have genuine parental consent as the information sheets may never have been read by parents. To ensure legitimate parental consent, an “opt-in” procedure was employed. Fifteen young people, six female and nine male, brought back signed parental consent forms within the two week time-frame available to collect data prior to the end of summer term. All fifteen young people agreed to participate in the focus groups. Fourteen out of the fifteen young people involved in the focus groups volunteered to participate in the individual interviews that were conducted eight weeks later, ten of whom eventually participated. Participants provided demographic data which was discerned using a demographic sheet that requested age, ethnicity, religious affiliation, parental working status, and composition of family living at home (see appendix I).

2.4.2.1 Response Rate

Of one hundred and eighty three parental consent forms sent home via form tutors, fifteen were returned. This number of participants was double the amount

required by my research proposal and enabled me to hold three focus groups. However, the response rate of eight per cent is objectively low.

The response rate could be in part accounted for by the construction of the study within the school as an external 'project' that was not compulsory for students or teachers, in that staff were not committed to discussing the study or to encouraging young people to participate. I had hoped to introduce the study to students in person by attending their form tutor sessions and / or attending a year group assembly. However, the head of SRE had indicated that form tutors would be very reluctant to have me join their form sessions to introduce the project to students and that joining an assembly would be impossible, both due to time constraints. I was, therefore, reliant upon form tutors, to whom I had not spoken, to introduce the project to their form group during the twenty-five minute morning form session by a method of distributing letters to young people to give to their parents. As a substitute to formally introducing the project, I wrote a short letter to each tutor thanking them for their assistance and giving a very brief explanation of the study, with a request for them to repeat the message to the young people (appendix J). Unfortunately a limitation of the study is the lack of uniform introduction of the study to young people. I have no way of knowing how the study and the consent form were framed by individual tutors in terms of the importance of passing the forms on to parents.

It is pertinent to note that those year nine students the Head of SRE had direct contact with, through her academic teaching sessions, were more actively encouraged to return the consent forms, resulting in a significant proportion of her students replying. The Head of SRE taught Art, which was compulsory in the school until the end of year nine and is taught in form groups, therefore, students were in mixed ability classes. It was circumstantial which year nine form groups had art lessons in the penultimate week of term and, therefore, who the Head of SRE had contact with.

This indicates that with increased discussion of the project and reminders to return forms, more young people were likely to return the consent forms.

The head of SRE explained that young people traditionally need a lot of reminders in order to return forms back to school.

Nonetheless, assuming that a reasonable number of consent forms did reach parents, carers and guardians, an alternative explanation for the poor response rate could be parental reluctance for their child to engage with the project for a myriad of potential reasons. Including: objections on moral, religious, personal or health grounds; equally parents may not object but rather prefer to educate their children themselves in matters of sex and sexuality. With childhood and youth being critical formative periods in the development of sexual and gender identity, the family, therefore, significantly impact children's developing beliefs, attitudes and practices around sexuality (McDonald & Parke, 1986; Walker, 2004). It could be suggested that the fifteen parents who provided consent could potentially be more open to sex education as a positive force. Their engagement with the research may indicate that they hold and promote more interactive and communicative approaches to issues of sex and sexuality, in turn influencing their children's approach to such topics (Walker, 2004). A range of sexual health outcomes for young people are associated with effective parental interaction and communication about sex (Elley, 2010) including delayed sexual debut, fewer partners (Johnson, Wadsworth, Wellings & Field, 1994) and increased contraception use (Wellings et al, 2001).

However, Kirkman et al. (2005) found that, despite the family's pivotal role in socialising "sexuality" in young people, family members found it difficult to communicate about sex and communication was still heavily constrained by gender, sexual taboos, "social mores" and parental factors and that the concept of "openness" around sexuality was ambiguous and contradictory. Walker (2001, 2004) explicated parental lack of awareness, confidence and embarrassment as key to making sex a difficult topic to discuss. Therefore allowing young people to participate in additional "SRE" projects may have seemed appealing to parents.

Furthermore, young people rarely cite parents as the main source of sex and relationship education (Kehily, 2002) citing embarrassment (Buston, Wight & Hart, 2002) and fear of negative parental assumptions about behaviour or

parental objections (Holland et al., 1998; West, 1999). Therefore, it could be suggested that the young people perhaps did not want to broach the subject with parents and may have avoided giving them the forms which they knew to be optional, perhaps indicating that those who did discuss it with parents felt more able to.

In sum, it would appear that those young people, whose parents consented, may have come from a family context where sex and sexuality is considered important enough to require discussion (Elley, 2011). It certainly indicates that the parents of this cohort do not feel sex is so taboo that it requires complete avoidance. This may mean that the young people in this study hold views that are more open to sexuality or opinions that are more practiced in terms of discussion. This will be explored more in chapter four.

2.4.2.2 Participant Culture, Ethnicity and Social Class

Adolescent sexual development is heavily influenced by the socio-cultural context in which it occurs (O'Sullivan & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2003) and cultural expectations regarding sexual behaviour become especially relevant during this period. The context of each of the ten young people participating in the individual interviews that comprised the research group in this study varies in terms of social class, culture, ethnicity and religion. Eight of the ten young people identified as having a religious faith. Three of the young people were second-generation settlers from other countries, and one young person was first generation. Two young people could be identified as "middle-class" using their parents' occupations as guides, the rest identified as working class. Ethnicity, religion and class are pivotal locations in the development of sexual beliefs (Bragg, 2006, Elley, 2011). As such, the contexts in which young people were developing will certainly have influenced and shaped the discourses available to, and appropriated by, them. However, this study set out to examine the experience of SRE for young people, and the impact that may have had on how young people were constructing their emerging sexual and gender identities. Therefore, the impact that culture and religion had on shaping constructions through discourse was not a question I focused on in my analysis. The implications of this are discussed in detail in chapter four.

However, in terms of methodology, FDA focuses on the language used by participants, rather than the participants themselves, the interview data itself was therefore considered sufficient to identify some commonly used discourses and their effects. The young people were situated within their context of the state-funded school. The aim of the study was to understand how the school context, and specifically SRE, was contributing to young peoples' understandings of their developing sexuality, it was not essential to examine the cultural, social, and ethnic contexts contributing to young people's talk. However, it is important to recognise the significance of the diverse range of socio-cultural contexts the young people are constructing their identities within.

2.4.3 Data Collection: Focus Groups

I conducted focus groups during three sessions involving different participants over a period of one week in July 2011 at the end of Year Nine, when most of the participants were fourteen, some thirteen. The focus groups were conducted in order to generate valid items for the interview schedule and also to develop skills in conducting FDA, in preparation for the thesis research analysis of ten individual interviews. Focus groups (FG's) in research on sex and sexuality are considered an effective method to stimulate discussion and generate hypotheses (Bertrand et al., 1992b). They are useful way of 'inviting participants to introduce their own themes and concerns' (Epsin, 1999: 228), allowing participants to determine their own agenda (Schelesinger et al., 1992: 29-29). Frith (2000) suggests a benefit of using FG's is to generate discussions that have greater personal concern for the participants. Ideally, participants are mobilised to respond to and comment on one another's contributions, which can steer discussions into unanticipated areas (e.g., Vera et al., 1996). Statements are challenged, extended, developed, undermined and qualified in ways that generate rich data (Willig, 2001: 29). This strength of the FG method was particularly pertinent to this study, where issues of power and dominant and subjugated discourses are essential to the analysis.

An essential aim of the FG's in this study was to generate knowledge of participants' language in relation to sex and sexuality. It was crucial to use

terminology in the individual interview schedule that would be understood by the participants and would tap into their 'knowleges' of how words and phrases operate in their social worlds. FG questions (appendix B) were constructed after reading relevant literature in the field and in consultation with my Director of Studies and Field Supervisor.

A final and crucial aim of the focus group was to create familiarity with me, the unknown adult researcher, and with talking about the topic. Additionally, in terms of analysis, it was particularly useful to have a direct point of comparison between public and private talk. This proved a particularly rich source of information, as young people were very interested to offer reflections on their experience of talking; this is explored in more detail in chapter four, however, it did not become part of the analysis chapter. Initially, I queried whether exploring the subject matter with other young people might produce bias, in terms of rehearsal of particular discourses and reinforcement, to privilege or subjugate particular knowledges. Although this was a concern, it was felt that the benefits of having young people feel more at ease, and the richness of data anticipated, were methodologically sound and reasonable arguments to use participants in both data collections. This method was ratified with young people able to offer reflections on the process as a whole and to consider differences between sessions when interviewed individually. This is explored in more detail in chapters three and four.

Focus groups took place during PHSE lessons in a large private room on the school grounds within the 'sixth form' area. Three different focus groups were conducted over two days: one all-male consisting of five young men; one all-female group, consisting of six young women, and one mixed group which included four (new) young men and two young women who had participated in the all-female group. Thus two of the female participants contributed to two focus groups. The choice to conduct three groups was based on the assumption that versions of reality are socially constructed, and this topic generally produces strong gendered discourses. It felt essential to evaluate what knowledge was constructed in the all-male group in relation to the all-female group and vice

versa. Equally, I wanted to emphasize any further differences in knowledge production and versions of sex and sexuality in the mixed gender group.

The focus group compositions and brief participant demographic information is, presented below, with corresponding pseudonyms when the young person went on to participate in individual interviews. Participants were asked to provide their age, ethnicity, religious affiliation, parental working status, and composition of family (see appendix I). Parental working status was used as a crude measure to reflect 'social class'. This was felt to be less intrusive than asking young people to reflect upon issues of class and / or categorise themselves; this is explored in chapter four.

Table One: Focus Group Composition

Focus Group	Number of Participants	Length of Session	Participant Demographics
All Female	6	49:36	P1 – Anna – White-British, 14, Working Class, Atheist P2 - Devya – British Indian, 14, Working Class, Sikh P3 - Fulmala – British-Bengali, 14, Working Class, Muslim P4 - Hannah – White-British, 13, Working Class, Jehovah's Witness P5 - Ingrid – White-British, 14, Working Class, Christian P6 - Jennifer – White-British, 14, Middle Class, No Religion
All Male	5	36:71	P7 – Christo – Romanian, 14, Working Class, Catholic P8 – Lee – White-British, 14, Middle Class, Church of England P9 – Guy – White-French, 13, Working Class, Christian P10 – White-British, Male, 14, Middle Class, No religion P11 – Ben – White-British, 14, Middle Class, Christian
Mixed Gender	6 (4 Male 2 Female)	49:12	P12 – Ethan – White-Welsh, 14, Working Class, Christian P13 – White-British, Male, 14, Middle Class, No Religion P14 – White-British, Male, 14, Working Class, Atheist P3 – Fulmala – British-Bengali, 14, Working Class, Muslim P5 – Ingrid, White-British, 14, Middle class, Christian P15 – Kamal – Caribbean-British, 13, Working Class, Christian

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The sessions were structured so that the interview took place around a core of open-ended questions. These questions were designed in such a way to explore and demonstrate how young people construct and articulate their perceptions of heterosexual relationships, and what is perceived to be important and problematic (Allen 2004). Talking openly about sex can often be uncomfortable and embarrassing (Kelley & Byrne, 1992), particularly for younger participants who may be inhibited by inadequate sexual vocabulary (Holland et al., 1998) and the ‘taboo’ nature of talking about sex (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Thus, talking to an unknown adult ‘researcher’ could be silencing for the young people. As detailed above, a primary aim of the focus group was to create a safe and comfortable environment in which participants began to feel relaxed to discuss sex and sexuality. Focus groups have been praised for providing such spaces, allowing participants to share their experiences and difficulties within a potentially supportive environment of others with similar lived experience (Frith, 2000; Krueger, 1988). It was hoped that the participants’ voices would gain prominence over the researcher’s, shifting the balance of power (Harper, 2012).

2.4.4 Data Collection: Interviews

Ten semi-structured interviews, using questions developed from the focus group data, were conducted by myself in September 2011, eight weeks after the focus groups and over the period of one week. The interviews took place during regular lessons in a large private room on the school grounds within the ‘sixth form’ area. Young people were excused from class for one hour. Twelve young people were offered individual interviews but Kamal decided not to participate as he did not want to miss his GCSE lessons and Lee was off school sick. A copy of the interview schedule can be seen in appendix C. The interview compositions and brief participant demographic information is presented below (on page 48):

Table Two: Interview Composition

Interview	Gender	Length of Session	Participant Demographics
Anna	F	44:11	White-British, 14, Working Class, Atheist
Ben	M	48:09	White-British, 14, Middle Class, Christian
Christo	M	45:21	Romanian, 14, Working Class, Catholic
Devya	F	59:48	British-Indian, 14, Working Class, Sikh
Ethan	M	29:56	White-Welsh, 14, Working Class, Christian
Fulmala	F	44:34	Bengali, 14, Working Class, Muslim
Guy	M	56:41	White-French, 13, Working Class, Christian
Hannah	F	50:25	White-British, 13, Working Class, Jehovah's Witness
Ingrid	F	49:08	White-British, 14, Working Class, Christian
Jennifer	F	59:48	White-British, 14, Middle Class, No Religion

Semi-structured interviews are a popular method of data collection when using FDA; it affords the participant control over interview content, hence allowing the participant to influence the agenda (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). One-to-one interviews were conducted in order to encourage young people to talk about their understanding of sex and sexuality in a confidential environment (Burman, 1994; Weedon, 1987). It was hoped that the interview data would reflect more individual and personal understandings and perceptions that were not as directly influenced by socially organised frameworks of meaning, allowed for in the FG setting (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). However, from a post-structural perspective, the constructions produced in students' talk are still seen as being dependent upon and specific to the context, which in this instance constituted an invitation to talk about sex, sexuality and SRE by an adult researcher. In this sense, the participants are not considered reflective of their actual experience of SRE but rather as '*a version of the events and practices experienced within their programmes*' (Jackson & Weatherall 2010: 72).

All participants in the individual interviews had participated in the focus groups and so were familiar with the researcher and the interview topic, hopefully helping them to feel more relaxed. Participants were asked about their experience of the focus group: how they found the experience of talking about sex; of talking about sex with peers; whether they found anything particularly interesting; and / or embarrassing or difficult to talk about. I scheduled the interview to contain a list of

themes along with prompt questions, which would be covered within the interview in any order, but led by the direction of the participant's narrative. Themes included questions about previous SRE, the content and the young person's evaluation of that, including positives and negatives. Questions generated from FG discussion about potential pressures for males and females; 'hidden' or 'secret' sex; gender differences in sexual experience; and expectations of sex and sexuality. A large part of the interview used a vignette similar to one used in FG's, which was found to be very helpful in generating discussion. The vignette was deliberately vague:

Mina and Layth are fourteen years old and have been going out for a while and are thinking of having sex with each other.

Young people were then asked to hypothesise how Mina and Layth might be feeling about this situation. What might have brought them to this point in terms of social, psychological, physical and emotional experiences so far, and about the social, psychological, physical and emotional implications / expectations that they may be anticipating as individuals, a couple, young people, etc.

2.4.5 Transcription

All focus groups and interviews were transcribed verbatim. A simplified transcription convention adapted from Potter and Wetherell (1987) was used. This approach is relevant and appropriate, as the research being conducted was not concerned with the detail of rhetoric and associated speech patterns but, rather the broader context of 'global' discursive constructions (Malson, 1998). For further details, the specific transcription conventions used can be seen in Appendix K.

2.4.6 Procedure

Initial analysis of the focus group and interview data involved repeated readings of both sets of transcripts, identifying prominent features such as topics, themes and issues, which developed into twenty-two categories of coding. Coding categories were defined and developed (Finn & Malson, 2008) and transcripts

were systematically coded according to these. Some examples of coding categories included: maturity; milestone; intimacy; to scare; humiliating; essential; positive; gendered SRE; negative bias of SRE; inequality of knowledge; 'secret' or 'hidden' sex; 'good' sex; sex as a 'task'; and social-judgement.

The next stage of analysis involved working with the coded transcripts to formulate a more thorough analysis (Finn & Malson, 2008). This stage was guided by Willig (2001) and Potter and Wetherell's (1992) approach to DA, as outlined by Finn and Malson (2009). At this stage, a number of central questions were considered when approaching the data including: what kinds of objects/events/experiences are constructed; what kind of identities are created from such constructions; what is made possible, in terms of subject positions, by these constructions; is there anything unsaid in the discourses; is there anything contradictory; how do young people constitute different objects; what possibilities for action are presented; and what power relations are made possible? This second stage of analysis showed how constructions were functioning, what they were achieving, how they contradicted or confirmed each other, and highlighted any inter-connectedness (Finn & Malson, 2009).

These patterns were then closely traced and a range of themes, issues and constructions emerged in relation to the discourse and experience of each: sex, sexuality and SRE. Some examples of themes and constructions that were developed and interrogated were:

- SRE as distancing from sex and knowledge of self.
- 'Secret' sex.
- Barriers to reconnection – the gendered experience of sex.
- Call for complexity – young people want inequality 'problematizing'
- 'Talk' as a useful tool to help problematize
- Adult responsibility.

Constructions were compared to transcripts, elaborating and considering contradictory accounts or challenges. Coherence began to develop with

decisions made about extracts to exclude and include. A 'story' of young peoples' constructions of SRE, their emerging sexuality and expectations of sex was developed. A detailed step-by-step process of analysis is included in appendix L.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Within this chapter, the findings from the research and the analysis which was subsequently conducted on ten individual interviews are presented and discussed. To aid the illustration of the findings, extracts have been taken from participants interviews and inserted in to the body of the text at appropriate points. This will also help to demonstrate how constructions are made possible, the subject positions and social practices that are enabled by them and will go some way to consider issues of power. Issues of power will be considered by examining the constructions and themes in relation to theory and research into gendered power. Reference will be made throughout this section to the research sub-questions:

1. How do young people construct their experience of Sex and Relationship Education (SRE)?
2. How do young people construct sex and sexuality?
 - a. *What social practices comprise these constructions*
 - b. *What social practices warrant such constructions*
3. What are the implications for action from these constructions?
4. What subjectivities are talked into being by these constructions?

This chapter will present constructions of three main themes which are permeated by social and material practices and sustain certain subject positions, and, therefore, not others. These have been termed: (1) Constructions of SRE; (2) Constructions of Young People; (3) Constructions of Sex as Functional / Transformative.

Each of the three themes will be addressed in the following sections however; the discourses that constitute them are not mutually exclusive and should not be read as such. Their inter-connectedness can be helpfully illustrated by employing the “rhizome” metaphor suggested by Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 7,) which describes language as *‘ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles’*. Using this description, the discourses that constitute the

themes can be seen as having conceptual or theoretical elements that are interconnected, multiple, diverse and thriving. This allows each discourse to draw upon the other 'whilst utilizing, interacting with, and being mediated by, other dominant discourses' (Carabine, 2001: 269). In keeping with the social constructionist stance of this research, the three discursive constructions are not presented as representing authentic truth but are offered as one of multiple understandings that could be made through analysis of the text.

3.0 Focus Group Data

Prior to exploring the main research analysis, it is pertinent to briefly refer to some of the themes that emerged in the focus groups. As explained in the methodology, the focus groups were conducted in order to generate valid items for the interview schedule. As such they do not form part of the research findings. However, focus group data was analysed in order to a) generate themes to guide interview schedule and b) to develop skills in conducting FDA, in preparation for the thesis research analysis. Some of the themes that emerged from the focus groups are appear in appendix M.

3.1 Section 1: Discursive Constructions of Sex and Relationships Education

3.1.1 *SRE as Protective*

There has been a significant amount of research, that has gone on to examine how young people develop and engage their sexual identity within school (Allen, 2007; Kehily, 2002; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003). This body of literature has demonstrated how schools actively and indirectly produce sexual identities through school routines and regulations, and directly through sex education curriculum (Allen, 2007). Young people negotiate, adopt and resist constructions of sexual and gender identity within the discourses available to them. The interviews in this study showed young people constructing their experience of sex education as protective. This construction of sex education was constituted by discourses of risk, neo-liberalism, and gender inequality, each of which will be explored throughout the analysis.

The interviews in this study showed young people constructing their experience of sex education as unrealistic and incongruent with their reality and lived experience. This construction of sex education was constituted by discourses of risk, neo-liberalism, and gender inequality, each of which will be explored throughout the analysis.

Corroborating previous research (e.g., Allen, 2007; Aggleton & Campbell, 2000); young people experienced official discourses of sexuality as dominated by a biological and risk management approach as illustrated in the following extract of talk by Hannah:

Extract One:

- H: We got taught about the rules about like age limits, and underage sex and protection erm, all the viruses and illnesses you can get from having sex, how to use protection, where you can go to get treatment if you think you're like pregnant or if you've got an illness
- SM: Do you think was that enough?
- H: Maybe a bit more but it's always like always saying "sex is a bad thing, you shouldn't do this or you shouldn't do that otherwise you'll die" and all this stuff, and it's just like [laughing] well you could say stuff that sounds a bit more positive!

(Hannah, 42-50)

As Hannah perceives it, a medical discourse of sexuality privileges a version of sex and sexuality that reduces the body to an object of disease and infection. This medical/health discourse of sex is used extensively in the current curriculum for sex based education in schools and features discursive strategies of biology, health, morality and the law. The discourse operates to legitimise this version of knowledge by directly 'giving' young people 'knowledge' of sexual intercourse,

sexual reproduction and sexual pathology by propagating essentialist biological models of consequences of sex.

The medical discourse further legitimises this version of knowledge (or regime of truth) about sexuality by the implicit normalisation of hegemonic heterosexual versions of sex and sexuality that is characterised by reproduction: 'where you can go to get treatment if you think you're like pregnant'. Hannah constructs pregnancy within a discourse of health and illness where it is positioned as an unwanted outcome requiring *remedy* much like an illness. Winckle (2011) explains how a biological model of knowledge legitimises an understanding of gender as dichotomous (and opposing) and, hence, authorises or legitimises the view of sexuality as heterosexual in nature, therefore, 'normalising and regulating action of both hegemonic masculinity and also emphasised femininity' (Winckle, 2008: 104). The "protection" afforded by SRE is understood by Fulmala as useful and necessary for young women:

Extract two:

F: I guess like, they mainly focused on protection, and how to put on a condom and all that and yeah

SM: And how was that then, does that feel helpful the stuff that they talked about

F: Yeah some of it was really helpful

SM: What was helpful?

F: Erm, just like learning about it really, cos we're gonna need it in future life otherwise we won't know what to do and we'll be pregnant in a young age

(Fulmala, 50-56)

Protection is characterised by the use of condoms; specifically how to 'put on' a condom. This account constructs the object of 'safe-sex' as a non-negotiable fact within a medical discourse positioning the young person as an active decision maker with access to the technical information. The biologically based account

of safety makes assumptions about the ability of young men and women to carry out the action when in the context of the sexual act (Shovell & Johnson, 2006).

Fulmala felt that what was helpful about this approach was having the information ready for a time when she would need it. This time was conceptualised as being in the future, when Fulmala would be older, indicating that she anticipates that in her future she would need the information which suggests that she perceives her future as including sexual experience. . This statement features the neo-liberal view of knowledge which upholds knowledge acquisition as part of the autonomous subject, a fundamental human right (Tapper, 1986). A neo-liberal discourse endorses the assertion that rational and informed decisions can be made once knowledge has been acquired (McNay, 2009). Discursive strategies associated with neo-liberal discourses include personal response, choice and essentialism. In consideration of Fulmala's identity as a Muslim, it could be deemed unusual that she feels she will need to know about contraception, due to a common societal discourse of Muslim women as virtuous and abstaining from sex (Kirmani, 2009) prior to marriage. However, it has been suggested by the young people in Hirst's (2004) analysis of the experience of sex education in a multi-ethnic school that this often-made assumption of Muslim students is erroneous. Educators state that many young people who are Muslim do not participate in sex education lessons (Hirst, 2004) through self-exclusion. White identities are often the only ethnicity identified in sexuality education. Policy documents devote minimal space to the diversity of ethnicities and cultural identities that make up UK schools (Bannerji, 1999). However, Fulmala, and her parents, had enabled her participation in SRE sessions, suggesting that they felt this was an important aspect of Fulmala's education, or alternatively, that it was not significant enough for them to object. Fulmala's extract appears to indicate the former; she appears to be welcoming sex education as relevant to her and her future life as a [Muslim] woman.

3.1.2 SRE as Inadequate or Incomplete

The neo-liberal discourse of knowledge acquisition employed in extract two also allows the young people to take up a position of 'knowledgeable subject' by

highlighting the deficiencies and absences in the sex education curriculum, as illustrated in the next extract of Ethan's talk:

Extract three:

E: Oh we just learnt how to put a condom on and er... that was it really, we didn't really learn that much about it, apart from the STI's and STD's, but I used to watch the sex education show on channel 4 so I was alright

SM: How was that compared to the sex education lessons in school?

E: Different.

SM: How different?

E: Because they talk about it more thoroughly and they explain everything instead of doing it in these lessons... they actually show you clips and everything of like school children talking about it, everyone having the same problem instead of just having like a one off or something

(Ethan: 56-63)

Ethan is depicting young people as 'sexual subjects with agency' able to understand and utilise these knowledges to make decisions. In his account of SRE, Ethan said he was "alright" as he had been able to watch a television programme that gave more thorough accounts of sex and sexuality. Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse & Hunter (2003) found that television can serve as a healthy sex educator to improve adolescent sexual knowledge; however, this is more effective when discussing the content with adults. Popular UK television shows portray certain behaviours as 'normal' or desirable, and can shape attitudes and behavioural norms among viewers (Verma, Adams, White, 2007). In this extract Ethan, therefore, positions himself as an active subject with agency – seeking out more realistic and comprehensive accounts of sexuality from the media. Within this construction, however, young people are simultaneously positioned as active agents whilst being docile to external agencies that produce

or disseminate knowledge. Implicit in this is the power of SRE to “give” “knowledge” as the next extract illustrates:

Extract four:

D: Mainly what we learn last year is contraception like condoms and that's it, like if you look at our citizenship booklets, that is the only page that is sex education

SM: And do you think you'll get more in the coming years?

D: I think that's it, cos like even our form tutor said that's the only sex education you'll get it's a bit like "Ooookay, is that it?"

(Devya, 847-855)

Devya and Ethan construct SRE as inadequate or incomplete. This perception is supported across interviews by almost all of the young people. This construction suggests that young people understand sex education to have the potential to be a good source of knowledge, but that unfortunately it is incomplete or inadequate to meet their needs.

3.1.3 Sex Education as Unrealistic and Incongruent with Lived Experience

In the following extract Hannah talks about SRE as being unrealistic due to what she regards as a negative bias.

Extract five:

SM: What do you want to know about it that sounds “more positive”?

H: I don't know like, how it will make you feel and stuff, not like always saying, "oh yeah it's a bad thing, you're gonna get ill and you're gonna die and you'll get pregnant and your parents are gonna kick you out" and stuff it's just like you could be positive

SM: You're saying you want more positive things,
so do you think there are more positives to
having sex?

H: Yeah there is more positives

(Hannah, 42-51)

In her account of sex education content, Hannah reproduces the discourses of risk and disease that constitute the dominant discursive construction of adolescent sex. However, Hannah resists the construction of sex as a bad and dangerous thing. Her use of the outcome of death was said with laughter and the exaggeration was felt to be humorous, positioning the construction of sex as bad and dangerous as extreme and somewhat laughable. Within SRE sex is constructed as risky and dangerous to the point of causing illness, family breakdown, homelessness and even death, a perception that Hannah is sceptical of. Resisting this construction of 'bad' sex, Hannah's account features a discourse of romantic sex, using discursive strategies of intimacy and emotion: 'like how it will make you feel and stuff'. Within this more romantic framing of sex, there is the assumption of sex as producing positive emotions or feelings. Although Hannah is sure that there is a positive side to sex, the construction of positive is constituted by the absence of the 'dangerous sex' discourse. This positive framing reproduces the dominant discourses in adolescent sexuality of sexual health as being disease free (Measor et al., 2000; Allen, 2007).

In general, the young people expressed scepticism at the overwhelmingly negative construction of sex and sexuality that they saw as being delivered by the sex and relationship education they received. They resisted the negative construction in different ways. Besides deployment of a romantic framing of sex as a means of resistance, as highlighted in Hannah's extract above, young people's resistance to a negative depiction of sex also drew on the idea of 'original' or 'primal' sex (Winckle, 2008); an innate drive within all individuals that is imperative for the continuation of humanity, as depicted by Ben:

Extract six:

SM: How does that make you feel about sex?

B: None of it is good. Obviously it is good to keep the humans going. [laughs]

SM: So after sex ed lessons you feel like sex is a bad thing?

B: Yeah but then I realise oh well it is a good thing, in some cases.

(Ben, 43-46)

As seen above, constructing SRE as inadequate and incomplete offers the young person access to the position of 'knowledgeable sexual agent' (Ingham, 2005; Allen, 2007). From such a position the young person can imagine an experience of sex and sexuality that is not confined to a biological discourse of disease and risk but encompasses other aspects of sexuality:

Extract Seven:

SM: And so I'm just thinking about, going back to the sex education that you've had in school: what did you think of the sex education that you've had?

G: It weren't very interesting; [we] didn't learn much. They only taught you about the stuff what you already knew.

SM: Like what?

G: Like STD's, HIVs.

SM: So what would be interesting to learn about?

G: Like what could happen in the future; stuff like that.

SM: Like what?

G: Like how can sex make it, don't know, but... just different because this teacher is telling you things what you... because a lot of kids nowadays know what happens with sex if you don't use a condom or nothing. But they don't tell you none of the good stuff, only the bad, bad, bad, bad, bad.

SM: And what's the good stuff? What would be the good stuff?

G: Like bringing a new life into the world; stuff like that.

SM: And what about the bad stuff. What's that about?

G: It's about getting the diseases. Like they say being pregnant is bad, but when also it could be good because you can bring new life into the world, and something what you love dearly.

SM What other stuff would you want to know about?

G: The relationship bit because they talk about young people having sex just for fun, but they never talk about the relationship side.

SM Right. What would be important to know about that?

G: Because like they say you have sex with someone you love dearly, and all that, but they [school] don't. They [school] say how young people have it for fun.

(Guy, 831-862)

Here Guy is constructing SRE as 'basic' and, therefore, inadequate highlighting a thin description of the imagined experience of sex. Guy's alternative construction of what SRE should include features a discourse of sex as having an emotional component that is not explored in school. Guy resists the dominant construction of young people as having "fun" or meaningless sex, constructing sex as an object of love. Sex is again linked with the outcome of pregnancy but here Guy resists the construction of adolescent pregnancy as wholly negative. Again he uses an emotional discourse associating sex with love and pregnancy with love. Guy, along with many other participants, described content about relationships and emotions as missing. SRE has been widely criticised for equating young peoples' sexual health simply as being disease free, rather than taking a more

holistic approach to the potential positives and benefits of sexual experience (Allen, 2005; Measor et al., 2000). Guy is critiquing the current framework of sexual health asking for a curriculum that includes young peoples' rights to sexual pleasure (Aggleton & Campbell, 2000). Ingrid also talked about SRE as being inadequate:

Extract eight:

- SM: So what do you think the aim of sex ed is as it is taught now
- I: Just to understand the consequences of sex and what could happen and what to do
- SM: You think anything is missing from that aim
- I: Just the whole concept of sex and relationships, like what happens, what's a good relationship, what's a bad relationship, what happens in relationships, and how to control a relationship
- SM: How to control it, what would that involve
- I: Just not like having someone lead you on, so you do know what a relationship is supposed to be like
- SM: Do you think that happens a lot, where people get led on
- Y: Yeah. They don't really know about like a relationship, they just go with what everyone else has said
- SM: Like... could you give me an example?
- I: Like most people think if you're in a relationship it's all about sex and all that but it's not, you have to like them and talk to them, it shouldn't be just be about having sex with them
- (Ingrid, 122-135)**

Similar to Hannah, in the extract above Ingrid talks about SRE as actively reproducing the idea that adolescent sexuality is confined only to the act of sex.

Through her assertion of a more holistic understanding of the sexual experience, Ingrid is constituted as a 'sexual subject with agency'. This position implies a right to comprehensive information to enable self-determining behaviour. . This constitution of self provides subject positions with agency; unlike those offered within SRE discourses, which position the young person as susceptible to the bad, dangerous, infection of sex that can only be resisted by the use of medical tools such as condoms or saved by morality in terms of abstinence.

The protective and risk management approach of SRE described by the young people can be seen to offer them a negative and limited understanding of themselves as sexual subjects. Allen (2008) points out that such programmes offer little opportunity for young people to acquire a sense of sexual self and entitlement. The construction of SRE as incongruent with lived experience constitutes a subject that is sceptical of the messages being purported which may contribute to disengagement with sexuality education (Allen, 2008).

3.1.4 SRE as Failing to Achieve Its Aims

As discussed in the introduction, a primary aim of SRE is to 'prepare' young people to negotiate sexual experience in a safe and healthy way through a biological and risk-averse discourse (Hagquist & Starrin, 1997). Use of a biological discourse of sex utilises the discursive strategies of rationality of mind and serves to intensify a mind-body split, marginalising the body and its desires (Paechter, 2004). This split is problematized by the young people who construct the denial of adolescent sexuality outside the realm of disease and risk as inadequate to perform the very task it intends – to prepare. The following extracts come from interviews where participants are being asked about whether they think that sex education prepares them for sex:

Extract nine:

SM: Do you think that sex ed prepares people for sex?

C: Erm, not really it doesn't really, it just, it tells you not to do it, so it doesn't really prepare you for it

(Christo, 485-488)

Extract ten:

I: We've done about contraception, and that was basically it... well we learned like how to put a condom on and that's all we really learnt like how to prepare for it

SM: Has that left you feeling prepared

I: No cos you don't really do about the asking [out of a potential partner] you just do about having sex, you don't really do anything outside of that

(Ingrid, 58-64)

Ingrid constructs the SRE content as reductionist 'you just do about having sex, you don't really do anything outside of that'; this construction highlights how SRE actually perpetuates the idea of teen sexuality as confined to penetrative sex. By ignoring other aspects of adolescent sexuality, young people are positioned only as 'a biological risk' in need of 'protection' or prevention. These constructions fail to leave them prepared for sexuality in the context of their lived experience 'you don't really do about the asking' – Ingrid was referring to the conversations one might have when considering sexual experience with a partner, which she describes SRE failing to prepare for. Lynne Segal and other feminist theorists have noted that the discrepancy between discourses of sexuality and their emotional and embodied experiences fails to acknowledge the aspects of sex such as intimacy, pleasure and reciprocity (Allen, 2004; Ingham 2005), which leaves the young persons' wishes and desires unknown and unexplored. The gendered subject positions made available to young people are not multiple, fluid and contradictory (Winckle, 2011), as would reflect their complex lived experience, but in this situation are hegemonic versions of biological sexual functions which act as oppressive regimes for adolescents of both sexes.

The typical biological discourse is constructed upon essentialist ideas about sexuality and how it is not only biologically determined, but also hormonally dictated; with adolescent sexuality constituted as dangerous and uncontrollable and adolescents, therefore, constituted as vulnerable (Baron-Cohen, 2003; Rose,

2000). In the extract above, Christo highlights the very limited positions available within this discourse for young people to occupy offering little space to develop a complex understanding of the sexual self or embodied sexual subjectivity.

3.2 Section Two: Discursive Constructions of Young People

3.2.1 *Young People as Teen Parents*

As briefly outlined in the introduction; sex education is a site of competing political interests (Allen, 2008) and serves as a vehicle for addressing a range of social, economic and moral issues (Thompson, 1994). Dominant constructions of teen parenthood constitute this group as typically female; single; a drain on the economy; as socially excluded (and therefore disadvantaged); and of having limited academic or professional success. This dominant construction and economic and social discourses appears in participants' accounts of the motivations behind SRE as described by Ben:

Extract eleven:

B: To not make us have sex
SM: Why is that?
B: Well the government can't you know, it's the money, they can't afford, and the NHS can't, they don't have the money to do it
SM: So you think it's going to cost the government money if you guys have sex?
B: Yeah
SM: How come, what makes you say that?
B: Like child support and all that
(Ben, 86-93)

Here Ben perceives SRE as being economically motivated and talks about the purpose of SRE as serving the needs of the powerful institutions. Ben directly links the needs of the government and NHS with regulation of young peoples' behaviour. Within this construction young people are constituted as requiring regulation by a powerful 'other' for the benefit of the economy. The legitimate

subject position offered is one of abstinence; delay until financially secure. This in turn legitimises the economic discourse for adolescent sexuality: that is, those subjects who are rational and forward thinking with a sense of enterprise will succeed, whereas those who engage in sexual activity are irresponsible; dangerous, and selfish, as Anna describes below:

- Extract twelve:**
- SM: What else do you think parents or adults worry about teenagers having sex?
- A: Um.. pregnancies and stuff like that
- SM: Why do you think parents and adults are worried about young people getting pregnant?
- A: Because you know you have like exams and stuff and you're not gonna have much time to study for that, and then you're not gonna have, like qualifications to get a job and then no job means no money to bring the kid up very well
(Anna, 444-453)

The notion of adolescent sex as an irresponsible action is reproduced in the above extract by its correlation with pregnancy. Anna constructs the pregnant young woman as unable to perform academically, as deprived financially and eventually causing the child harm. The discourse of 'dangerous adolescent sex' is so intimately linked with 'teen pregnancy' that it is constructed as an inevitable consequence. Despite the increased acceptance of sex and reproduction outside of marriage in the UK, and a proven decline in the rate of teenage pregnancies (ONS, 2006), the issue of teenage parenthood remains a major social, political and moral concern (Macvarish, 2010). Jean Carabine (2007) highlights the shift made in 1997 by the New Labour government when they framed teen pregnancy as an issue of social exclusion that causes poverty and deprivation, a discourse that features in Anna's extract. The adolescent mother's age, not her unmarried status, is detrimental to the child's health and her own choices in life, shifting the gaze from moral judgement to a health concern where the babies of teenage mothers are associated with low birth-weight (in fact only true of the very youngest mothers); low IQ; and more likely to be exposed to

unhealthy behaviour such as poor diet and smoking (Bamfield, 2007). However, sociologist Munira Moon Charania (2009) states that:

“While girls embody the problem, it is the constellation of social positions they occupy as adolescent, immigrant, non-white, and working class that underlines much of this concern, if not shaping the very means by which the problem is defined” (Charania, 2009: 308)

Those young women most ‘at risk’ of such poor health behaviours and lack of rationality to avoid them are likely to occupy most of the social positions suggested by Charania, and as thus are constructed by multiple conflicting discourses. It is suggested by SmithBattle (2000:30) that the modern stigma faced by adolescent mothers is not due to the sin of sexual promiscuity, but is the sin of “not planning and rationally choosing their future”.

When asked what the aims of SRE are Christo stated:

Extract thirteen:

C: Yeah so to get like the teenagers scared so they don't do it

SM: Can you tell me a bit more?

C: Yeah to reduce like pregnancies, and... yeah just to reduce pregnancies and like STI's

(Christo, 163-165)

Here, Christo talks about the aims of SRE as being about the prevention of pregnancy and disease. SRE is positioned as actively deterring them by constructing the object of pregnancy as inevitable and fearful. This discourse operates to legitimise this version of knowledge of sex and sexuality by using the discursive strategy of teen pregnancy as irresponsible and detrimental employing discursive strategies of economics; morality; and the idea that successful subjects are enterprising and forward focused (Carabine, 2007; Macvarish & Billings, 2010; SmithBattle, 2000). Within this discourse sex is de-eroticised and is constructed as causing pathology in the body (pregnancy or disease).

Pregnancy is further constructed as a female problem in the next extract by Ingrid:

- Extract fourteen:**
- I: Your parents cos they'd be saying, oh you're too young, and you've got all your life ahead of you and all your career and you could mess it up
- SM: Is this by having sex?
- I: Yeah
- SM: Why would having sex mess it up?
- I: Because if you get pregnant it can change the rest of your life. And they just think you're too young if you get any diseases
- (Ingrid, 184-190)**

In this extract sex and pregnancy are constructed as synonymous with the dangerous object of disease; with pregnancy positioned as the inevitable outcome of sexual intercourse. Here Ingrid is drawing on a discourse of 'pregnancy as social exclusion' (Macvarish, 2010; Carabine, 2007). Sex is constructed as an object of consequence: the consequence of sexual intercourse for young women is life changing in a way that closes avenues of academic and economic progression privileged within the education system:. The subject is constructed as promising and productive (Marshall, 1996; McNay, 2009) with sex conceptualised as an ominous force that could wreck the future life. This construction of sex allows the young woman to occupy a subject position of responsible abstinence or irresponsible sexual actor. This discursive construction talks into being binary constructions of feminine sexuality as 'good' or 'bad'. Holloway (1984, 1989) and Ussher (1994) have explored women as embodied sexual agents in depth. Within constructions of feminine sexuality, there is a dominant discourse that positions feminine sexuality as dichotomously good or bad. Sometimes known as the 'have/hold' discourse (Holloway, 1984) or the 'Madonna/whore' discourse (Ussher, 1994); it is a symbolic construct predicated on the Christian principle that sex should take place within a lasting and committed heterosexual relationship (Bryant & Schofield, 2007). One of the

fundamental features of this discourse is the conceptualisation of female sexuality as 'inherently depraved and dangerous' (Bryant & Schofield, 2007) and, therefore, in need of control to protect social morality. This extract reproduces the binary construction of young women as good and bad but within an economic and productivity framework. Within this construction, young women are not being saved from moral ruin but, rather, economic ruin, and are regulating themselves and one another through a discourse of self as enterprise (McNay, 2009). The subject positions available to occupy are narrow and limiting. Anna reproduces this version of knowledge below:

- Extract fifteen:**
- SM: Do you think sex education prepares you for any of those issues?
- A: Yeah i think so because it would, it almost puts you off, so then it probably reduces like that situation.
- (Anna, 127-129)**

Anna constructs SRE as preparing young women for sexuality as it effectively delays the start of sexual activity. This construction of female sexuality offers a position of safety by abstinence. In this construction any corporeal feelings and desires are invisible and unknowable (Butler, 1990; Ussher, 2005). McNay, 2009).

3.2.2 Young People as Sceptical Subjects

In the extract below the young person is positioned as a 'knowledgeable sexual subject' – able to evaluate SRE and find it unrealistic in relation to other knowledges they have about sexual experience:

- Extract sixteen:**
- D: It's cos they [other young people] kind of block it out, like in sex ed like some of us just end up ignoring whatever the tutor says and he asks you, "what did i say, who was listening?" and you're like "huh? what?" [laughs]
- SM: So why do you think they block it out?

D: I think they think it's okay to have sex, because yeah they... we know that there's a risk and everything but we think it's still okay.

(Devya, 793-800)

The construction of adolescent sex as dangerous, as upheld by SRE, is resisted by drawing on a discourse of rational knowledge acquisition and decision making. Devya, as a knowledgeable sexual subject, is aware of the 'risks' but constructs them as insufficient, to the point that rational evaluation concludes they are no longer worth listening to. The construction of sex and sexuality by SRE is incomplete and, therefore, invalid which allows the young person to occupy a position of informed scepticism; however, it is unclear what 'okay' in terms of sexual health means. The critique of SRE as promoting a version of sexual health in relation to the absence of disease could be applied here. The sceptical subject is unable to construct the alternative positive sexual health in a meaningful way due to an absence of positive or erotic discourses (Allen, 2007).

The SRE curriculum as talked about by the young people locates sex and sexuality within a rational fact-based frame of reference. This discourse constitutes the sexual subject as gendered, cohesive and uniform with capacity for rational sexual decision making (Walkerdine, 2004). This construction of the sexual subject promoted in SRE is authorised by a biological model of knowledge, which is in turn implicitly informed by assumptions of gender, heterosexuality and adolescence, thereby normalising these discursive practices. The biological discourse of sex, sexuality and sexual decision-making reduces the young peoples' lived experience to simple biological facts (male sexual drive and female reproductive system) with readily available medical solutions (the contraceptive pill, barrier protection such as condoms). This discourse does not give space for young people to understand and consider a lived experience that is diverse and concomitant with social, political and economic factors (Harris, 2004; Hunt, 2003; Winckle, 2011) and, therefore, pathologises those unable to make the 'right' choices (Spencer, Maxwell & Aggleton, 2008). Furthermore, this discourse actively oppresses young people through its denial of their sexual experience and subjectivity, except for within a risk discourse.

3.2.3 *Young Women and the Double Standard*

Resisting this authorised version of female sexuality by engaging in sexuality outside of 'safe' parameters, such as long-term heterosexual and monogamous dyad (Holland & Ramazannoglu, 1992) positions young people as either dangerous or irresponsible subjects. To occupy a subject position of an 'active sexual subject', within the public forum of SRE, is to place oneself in a place of danger in terms of public humiliation or shame as the next extracts show:

Extract seventeen:

- J: Yeah, it was like, you've always got certain people who have done it they like to talk about it. And the people who haven't, like the people who haven't think "Oh I haven't done this" and they might feel a bit strange and the people who've done it think "Oh these people might be judging me for the stuff I've done". And with boys like if something came up on the screen like a picture or something, or we're talking about it, they might shout out names of girls
- SM: And what does the teacher do in that situation
- J: Well they tell them off but they don't have, i think they [the boys] should get more of a punishment. I think they should be shamed as well.
- SM: Why, does the girl feel ashamed?
- J: Yeah, cos everyone knows about it and people start to say things

(Jennifer, 269-280)

SRE is delivered within a dominant patriarchal, hegemonic and heterosexual framework where discursive strategies of romance, marriage motherhood and family are normative (Holland et al., 2004). Within this version of knowledge females are constituted as passive and innocent (Bryant & Schofield, 2007).

Deviating from this dominant version of sex and sexuality by taking a position that appears to require more information about sex and sexuality, by talking about it with teachers and/or peers in a the public forum of class puts the young woman in a dangerous position: Jennifer's account describes verbal insults that that she feels are minimised by the teacher. Females are positioned in a disempowered position in the classroom by the use of a double-standard discourse (Holloway, 1984a; Ussher, 1994) of the 'good' girl versus uncontrollable male sexual drive. These dominant discourses of sexuality, masculinity and femininity appear to enable tolerance of verbal insults of females in the classroom. Lees (1986) has argued that these discourses have been effective in silencing women, disciplining their behaviour and regulating their sexual interactions. Within the classroom the power imbalance is tipped further as the young women are also children in relation to a powerful (male) teacher. The regulation of female sexuality in school through a technology of silencing is further illustrated by Ingrid when she is formulating an alternative format for SRE where young people can speak without fear of judgement from peers, teachers and parents

Extract eighteen:

SM: So does anyone benefit from adolescents keeping sex hidden

I: You don't really benefit from it, because you just, it builds up inside of you, and you just don't have anyone to talk to and it can bring you down and teachers will notice and wonder why and then eventually you will have to tell them

SM: What would be better then?

I: If you could talk to people like, if they understand, and if we knew what we was going through and we felt it was right that we could talk to teachers and they would actually listen and not go telling other people. Our parents would take our thoughts into consideration not just jump to conclusions...

SM: How could you do that?

- I: Like if there was groups that you could go to, or if there was like someone you could talk to
- SM: You think that type of format would be helpful
- I: Yeah or if something out of school that you could go to and no-one had to know... what is she talking about? You want them to know but then you're worried about what they're going to say
- SM: And what do you think they would say?
- I: I think it depends, you don't know, cos they could go round and tell people behind your back
- SM: What would that mean?
- I: everyone's gonna know and they're all gonna be talking about you and you won't know. They'll probably think you're a slag
- SM: For wanting to talk about sex?
- I: Yeah and like [as] if you've done it. Well some people talk to their friends if they can trust them, but then sometimes it does go out and they do spread it
- (Ingrid, 476-493)**

Both Ingrid and Jennifer construct their experience of SRE in the context of school as volatile and unpredictable, as affording them a loss of confidentiality or security. In these accounts, any acknowledgement or verbalisation of female sexual subjectivity is immediately constructed as 'bad' with the young women potentially ostracised and judged by peers, teachers and parents, and positioned as a 'slag' by peers. Within the 'Madonna/whore' discourse proposed by Ussher (1994) female sex is positioned dichotomously as morally good or bad; 'good' in response to male desire within a committed relationship and 'bad' when actively sought by the female and outside of a partnership. This discourse of female sexuality is so prevalent as to be reproduced and propagated before a female has even spoken. The presence of an image or a concept of sexuality (in the

school context in this research the image would typically be related to an STI) presented by the teacher in sex education lessons results in females being publically singled out and constructed as the 'bad / whore' subject. Jennifer resists this construction of female sexuality as deviant or inappropriate saying that the young men should be punished or "shamed" for publicly humiliating girls. Here Jennifer constructs the public subjectification of young women as unequal in relation to men and furthermore unjust. Jennifer's resistance can be seen to be reliant upon a powerful 'other' (Derrida, 1973) to regulate the behaviour and thinking of young men. Jennifer's awareness of inequality relates to her perception of the school as failing to 'educate' young men appropriately.

Discursive constructions of teen sex over the past twenty years, and specifically since the 1999 Labour White Paper, have utilised discourses of health and protection. This discourse of 'protection' holds the assumption that sexuality is 'risky' as opposed to pleasurable. The young person is constituted as susceptible to 'his' own uncontrollable biological and hormonal urges is often constructed within a discourse of 'male sexual drive' (Holloway, 1984) which is characterised by emotional volatility rendering the young person incapable of effective decision making (Marshall, 1996). The outcome of sex is implicitly defined as negative, with 'risks' to health constructed within a medical discourse and aligned with a moral discourse of appropriate sexual behaviour as propagated by SRE designed to 'protect' the young person from such dangerous implications as disease, and most importantly, pregnancy (Measor et al., 2000; Hirst, 2004). The discourse of "teen sexuality" is inherently linked to the abhorrent consequence of pregnancy; this discourse positions the teen parent as economically bereft, unsupported, and lonely and excluded from society (Macvarish & Billings, 2010). This construction of the adolescent 'at risk' of pregnancy is reproduced in the participants' talk when asked how they understand SRE as evidenced in the extract below:

Extract nineteen:

E: It's all protective

SM: It's all protective, so why do you think that approach is taken to teaching it?

- E: Because they know some people will have underage sex and they just want you to use protection and then the girls get pregnant underage and then it's hard for them to cope
- SM: Hard for the girls to cope?
- E: And then the men have to cope as well with having a child
- SM: So they're worried that young people will get pregnant?
- E: They can ruin their life
- SM: How come?
- E: Cos they're too young and they can't cope with school, coursework, college, and the baby as well
- SM: So what would happen then?
- E: The baby would probably be taken into care and the family would have to look after it
- (Ethan, 161-175)**

Within this framing of teen sexuality as involving the need for protection of young people against pregnancy, three discursive strategies are operating. The first is the construction of sex as dangerous and uncontrollable, with pregnancy positioned as an inevitable negative outcome. The second discursive strategy is achieved through the representation of young people as innocent subjects that require protection from “disease” and “ruin”; Ethan describes SRE as “protective” helping avoid the (inevitable) negative consequences of “underage sex”. The subject is positioned without agency; passively ‘at risk’ of the consequences of sex and so requiring external guidance and protection to ensure ‘sexual safety’.

The third strategy is achieved through representation of young people as immature and incapable subjects. In this extract the incapable subject is constructed within a school system where the primary function is to produce a performative and competitive subject (Marshall, 1996); one who is future focused (Fejes, 2008) and understands their life and identity as a type of enterprise

(McNay, 2009). Ethan describes the presence of a baby as affecting the subjects' ability to achieve and perform academically. Pregnancy is conceptualised as incompatible with a construction of the enterprising and performing subject, therefore, legitimising the discourse of 'teen sex' as negative. This discourse, that irrevocably links sex with pregnancy, renders an empowered female sexual subject position impossible due to the overwhelming inevitable 'risk'.

3.3 Section Three: Discursive Constructions of Sex

3.3.1 *Sex as Functional and Transformative*

This section further implements the critical discourse method of analysis informed by Foucault (1980) and utilised by Jean Carabine (2001) to interrogate and explain the young peoples' dominant perceptions of sex and sexuality. The discursive construction of sex and sexuality as functional and transformative is now explored to elucidate the ways in which power and knowledge operate through discourses to produce and legitimise particular versions of sex and sexuality.

Although all young people constructed sex in different ways, a theme of sex as functional and/or transformative was ubiquitous throughout the interviews. As the title of this theme suggests sex is constructed as an entity that effects change or transformation in the young persons' life. As such, it is constructed within a discourse of 'sex as consequence' propagated by the SRE programmes and wider society when applied to young people, for example resulting in disease or pregnancy (Spencer, Maxwell & Aggleston, 2008; Hunt, 2003; Monk, 1998). However, the discourse of 'sex as functional/transformative' talks into being different 'consequences' to those highlighted and protected against within official discourses. In constructing their imagined experience of sex, the young peoples' lived experiences as an adolescent, child, female and male, shapes sex into an object of consequence which serves to produce it as functional and/or transformative. Constructions of sex utilised various discourses, enabling different practices in terms of how the young person might use the object of sex, as well as having different implications for the subject positions that are made

available. In this way, sex is constructed as a technology of self (Foucault, 1980) – this idea will be explored in the following subsections.

Three ways in which ‘sex as functional / transformative’ was talked into being were identified. The first of these concerned sex as a task of adolescence, as a milestone to demonstrate maturity.

3.3.1.1 *Sex as a Milestone to Maturity*

Within a framework of FDA, the construction of maturity may be seen as a set of self-constituting practices in different settings of power. Maturity represents membership of the self-governing adult community. Within western societies the period of adolescence is widely constructed in terms of tasks to accomplish and milestones to reach in an appropriate manner; education, drivers licence, independence, functional relationships outside of the family unit (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988; Chassin, Presson, Sherman & McConnell, 1995). This discourse of adolescence uses discursive strategies of biology and psychology where the adolescent body is constructed as an object of rampant biological change and volatile hormonal fluctuations, expected to grow and develop according to normative expectations for gender (Griffin, 2004a). The adolescent psyche is constructed as a malleable object, receptive to outside influence and tasked with the directive to adapt and develop into an independent and productive identity that is stable and self-regulating, and able to function within society’s expectations. In this sense, maturity is constructed as a way for young people to constitute themselves as ‘successful’ adolescents, within a social and cultural context which constructs the adolescent largely in negative terms. The young people tended to construct sex as a task of adolescence to demonstrate their maturity status as exhibited by Fulmala:

Extract twenty:

SM: And then what about, what are your positive expectations, if you've got any, of like sex and sexuality?

F: Erm... i think it's, the whole idea it's good for people to relate to, cos, it matures them in a way, erm, if it's fun sex, they're just pretty much

immature, but if it's like two people who trust each other, who've been with each other a long time, it's good for them to mature in future and to relate to really

SM: So it makes them more mature?

F: Yeah, and it makes them ready for life really

(Fulmala, 671-679)

Fulmala constructs sex as a technology of self to achieve 'maturity' and become an ideal candidate for 'life'. However, Fulmala's construction of sex as technology of self to achieve 'mature' (and, therefore, adult) status is only possible within the committed monogamous relationship dyad. The object of sex is morally good and functional within the confines of the 'have/hold' discourse (Holloway, 1984). This provides a narrow range of acceptable circumstances available to sexual subjects. The binary constructions of good (committed, long-term, exclusive) and bad ('fun', 'immature') relationships result in marked restrictions on the young persons' opportunity to develop a sexual subjectivity that draws on a range of sexual practices and relations (Connell, 1995). Specifically, the dichotomy between appropriate 'good' sex and inappropriate 'fun' sex serves to limit an ethics of pleasure in relation to young people and sex (Allen, 2007). Those young people that operate within the binary boundaries of 'good' are positioned as 'proper' and 'mature', legitimising and giving credence to the discourse of heteronormative sexuality within an exclusive, monogamous relationship. This is illustrated in the next extract where Hannah is talking about what Mina and Layth (the fictional young couple in the case vignette) would be looking forward to about having a sexual relationship:

Extract twenty one:

H: Cos like basically like girls like our age and stuff feel insecure about their bodies and stuff and when they've [boys] seen them [girls] at their worst, sort of thing, like they'll feel more comfortable around them, cos like most girls our age like put on loads of makeup and dressed up when there's boys and stuff, but

when you're in a secure relationship you see the girl without any makeup on, so she feels like more comfortable around him and not like have to deal with her insecurities and stuff

SM: Because they'd seen her and they still liked her?

H: Yeah

SM: And what do you think "Layth" [the boy in the vignette] would be looking forward to?

H: As a boy like our age, it would just be the sex normally. Like maybe if they were, if they weren't an idiot they'd probably, if they cared about her they'd like be looking forward to the intimacy with her and stuff, but boys our age are just - done. Bye. [laughs]

(Hannah, 319-336)

Sex as a technology of self here includes the construction of sex as a means of gaining confidence. In Hannah's talk, a sexual relationship transforms the young woman from being insecure to confident. However, it is confidence by proxy: that is, the male acceptance of the young woman's physical form means she can let go of self-doubt and become "comfortable". Hannah's construction of female sexual experience appears to be informed by a romantic discourse of being accepted for who one is, despite imperfections (Milnes, 2010; Jackson, 2001). The romantic discourse is a dominant cultural discourse that young women employ to describe the sexual experience (Holland et al., 1998; Gavey & McPhillips, 1999) and is usually characterised by love, trust, intimacy and commitment (Miles, 2010) which is embraced in Hannah's imaginings of the "secure" relationship outcomes. The young woman can trust the man enough to show herself without make-up and he will still accept her, love her, for who she is. By using the romantic discourse in this way, Hannah silences any perception of sex to meet sexual desires for the female (Jackson, 2005). At the same time, the male is constructed as having very different, almost apposing, ideas about sex - bringing into being the male-sexual-drive discourse (Holloway, 1989) that boys

are only interested in the act of sex and are not concerned about the intimacy that characterises romantic sex for females. This construction of sex as technology of self to achieve confidence authorises essentialist constructions of male and female sexuality that ratify sexual double standard. This constrains female sexuality inside the realm of heteronormative activity where the male is sexually virile and the female is emotional and in love, feeling 'comfortable' and confident due to male acceptance. The next extract of talk by Ben constructs sex as a technology of self to gain confidence by social performance:

- Extract twenty two:**
- SM: What would be a young man your age's positive expectations of sex and sexuality?
- B: Feeling good and getting to do it and boast about it
- SM: Which would be more important, or the main thing do you think?
- B: Probably showing off to their friends
- SM: What does that mean for them?
- B: It builds their confidence and they seem cool now that they've done it
- (Ben, 424-430)**

Confidence in this context is closely linked with the concept of self-esteem, which has been re-conceptualised within a Foucauldian framework as 'specialised knowledge of how to measure, evaluate, discipline and judge ourselves' (Cruikshank, 1996). That is, we govern our own behaviour within the parameters set by society, culture and context. In this respect, confidence can be conceptualised as technology of governmentality; by adopting the goal of confidence a particular type of self is produced that is in line with the governing regime. In Ben's talk he constructs sex as a means of achieving the goal of confidence by performing within the hegemonic heterosexual discourses that are available to young men. Within this discursive construction, Ben imagines himself as a normative male sexual agent using the object of sex to achieve status amongst peers. The power of the male peer group is obvious in this extract, with Ben rating the ability to boast about sexual intercourse as more

positive than sex itself. Talking about sex and conquest is a crucial mechanism of the male peer group and is essential to maintain inclusion and power (Holland et al., 1998).

The internalised ideals about what constitutes a 'confident' and 'cool' male (heterosexual performance) can be seen as a form of self-government. Because the subject adopts these ideals for himself, the 'state' does not have to enforce them. This discourse privileges a version of adolescent male sexuality through visible sexual performance; by engaging in sexual activity the male subject is validated. This version of adolescent male sex is validated by the performance and public repetition of sexual intercourse, therefore, legitimising the discourse of heterosexual performance as normal and ideal.

Extract twenty three: J: Like, how it can make you more confident...
like someone likes you and you, like you're...
not respected, like you feel like... oh i can't
really... Like erm... if they've done stuff with
you, you sort of think... well, you're a bit more
confident, and you can sort of face the world a
bit more, and you think, if i've done that, maybe
i can do this as well
(Jennifer, 238-242)

In the above extract Jennifer positions sex as a technology of self by also constructing sex as a means of gaining confidence. This uses a discursive strategy of romantic love ('somebody likes you') and validation by the dominant male (Holloway, 1984). Female confidence is thus talked into being in relation to the male. By being 'liked' by the male, the female is selected from an undifferentiated collective of females and is subsequently able to 'face the world' with some pride and sense of achievement. Within this discursive construction the male is the powerful and benevolent sexual actor; selecting the female object reproducing the commonly accepted practices of femininity as passive. To attract status, and power, the female takes up the object position in the male sexual drive discourse (McRobbie, 1978). The female subjectivity that is brought into

being within this discursive construction is one of an empty female waiting for validation from the potent male. It reproduces and authorises hegemonic masculinity as powerful and femininity as not. The subject position available is one of submissive patience. The opportunity for female confidence to develop is impossible without the presence of the male.

Confidence can be conceptualised a technology of governmentality; by adopting the goal of confidence a particular type of self is produced that is in line with the governing regime (Harris, 2005; Robinson, 2012). In Jennifer's talk, by performing within the hegemonic masculinity discourses that are available to young women (passive, submissive) (Holloway, 1984), sex is a means of gaining confidence, status and legitimacy (Allen, 2003). Within this discursive construction, Jennifer imagines herself as a normative female sexual object in need of validation by the powerful male. In a sense, Jennifer is also using female sex as an object to achieve status. The female's empowerment can be seen a process of acceptance of male dominated heterosexuality (Jackson, 2005; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Tolman, 2005).

3.3.1.2 *Sex as Experiential Learning*

Within the meta-discourse of sex as functional / transformative, a construction of sex as experiential learning was dominant. Within this frame, sex is discursively constructed as a pragmatic method to acquire knowledge about sexuality. As already highlighted in this analysis, a dominant construction of SRE was as inadequate or incomplete. Participants constructed SRE as incongruent with their lived experience of sexuality and positioned adults as giving irrelevant messages that were aimed at promoting abstinence, rather than education or preparation. Young people men and women positioned themselves as sceptical critical subjects, able to recognise deficits in the curriculum. This construction offered subject positions for young people as agentic actors, able and willing to seek out appropriate knowledge. An understanding of 'Knowledge' within a Foucauldian framework is one of power; knowledge is always a form of power (Hall, 2001). This is expressed in the following extract of Christo's talk:

Extract twenty four: C: Like you do feel relieved cos you like, if you're

in a group of friends that had all most of them done it you'd feel relieved if you've done it as well. You're not the odd one out. And like when they talk about it you'd have less knowledge of it if you haven't done it.

(Christo, 463-465)

Christo constructs sex as the conduit through which knowledge and, therefore power, is attained. This version of sex is constructed within a discursive framework of masculinity that is successful and powerful but only in relation to others who are not (Holland et al., 1998). Sexuality within this framework is competitive and centres on men's demonstration of heterosexual potency. Christo constructs a lack of sexual knowledge as having social effects of exclusion and, therefore, loss of power within the competitive framework available to young men. Within this discursive construction the act of sex is the route to knowledge and power.

In the next extract, Jennifer is talking about how a person knows they are 'ready' for sex. She imagined that you would 'feel emotional things when you looked at the person' and that you realise that 'you don't think its [the act of sex] that bad', (Jennifer, 672), in terms of realising that sex is not 'wrong', however, she went on to say:

Extract twenty five: J: Well... i'm not sure at the moment i'm ready. I think it's okay but there's also like negatives to it. You can't really tell until you've done it, it doesn't really, you can't really know, it sort of just happens

(Jennifer, 679-682)

She constructs the act of sex as knowledge of whether one is 'ready' or not, excluding any other avenue of recognising 'readiness' for sex, including emotional feelings and realisation that sex is not morally wrong. The discursive construction of feminine sexuality is one of a void until the act. Jennifer thinks

there may be 'negatives' to embarking on a sexual relationship but does not construct any active sexual subjectivity. Sex as experiential learning is constructed as the only way to have knowledge of one's 'readiness' (Hawes, Wellings, & Stephenson, 2010). Readiness for sex is constructed within a discourse of female sexuality as passive. Fine (1984) argues that young women are effectively denied a subject position from which to make active choices about sex and sexuality due to an absence of a discourse of desire. Thus, the construction of sex as experiential learning in this case is one of default, as there is no other legitimate way for young women to actively seek out sexual knowledge. Sex in this instance is impervious to the categorisation of "knowing" without the act, thereby questioning the validity and relevance of SRE.

In the next extract, the case vignette was used to ask Ethan what he imagined the fictional couple, Mina and Layth, might be looking forward to in a sexual relationship. He constructs sex as experiential learning within a discourse of pleasure for both parties:

- Extract twenty six:**
- SM: What type of pleasure, can you explain that to me?'
E: Sexual pleasure, like what it feels like to have it and then they're [both partners] gonna see if they want it even more or not.
SM: Is there anything else they'd be looking forward to
E: Maybe mental maybe mentally they know what to prepare themselves for next time if they don't like it
(Ethan, 254-259)

Here a version of sex is constructed that includes physical sexual pleasure as an effect of sex; allowing a subject position of physical pleasure seeking within a permissive discourse (Holloway, 1984). However, in the next line sex is constructed as an intellectual endeavour requiring preparation to cope with unpleasant effects. The subject position shifts to one of 'mentally able' to cope

with the effects of sex, in order to prepare oneself, should the act turn out to be unpleasant. This construction of sex as experiential is talked into being within a male sexual drive discourse of hegemonic masculinity which denies the possibility that a male would not continue to pursue sex, despite not enjoying it. Pleasure is constituted by the 'doing', as is 'preparedness'; only after the act is one able to reflect and mentally prepare for any difficulties.

In contrast to Ethan, in the next extract Devya shares an idea that the pleasure of sex for girls is about getting to know one another and building a close relationship. Sex as a technology of self here includes the construction of sex as a means of strengthening the emotional bond and increasing intimacy, which enables the woman to feel more secure in her relationship, inferring upon her status and power (Holloway, 1984a; Butler, 1990).

- Extract twenty seven:**
- D: I think if we do have sex it will make us much closer and much more confident with each other, than we already are like, still sometimes I'm like "oh my god, really nervous around him"
- SM: why do you get nervous?
- D: I dunno I just get butterflies when I'm walking down like "oh my god!"
- SM: Is it because you're excited or is it because you're nervous
- D: Yeah cos i'm nervous
- SM: And so you think that will go away if you have sex with him
- D: Yeah I think so cos then at least you know each other a bit more like you've got nothing to hide or anything
- (Devya, 660-668)**

3.3.1.3 *Sex as Social Currency for Males*

A construction of 'sex as social currency' was constructed as a technology of the self; young people variously use the experience of sex to story themselves in

particular and disciplined ways, in order to become a successful male or female within the discourses of femininity and masculinity available to them. A discourse of enterprise of self is employed; whereby the autonomous citizen is one who can manage a diverse set of social networks, for example of school, friendships, the pursuit of 'confidence', in a responsible fashion that maximises their own happiness (Miller & Rose, 2008). Essential to this concept of self-as-enterprise is that the individual acts as an entrepreneur developing and promoting their life. By this analogy, others are competitors and one's own life is a form of capital investment (McNay, 2009). Therefore, the young person's enterprise constitute a successful performance of masculinity and femininity; reproducing and legitimising dominant discourses of gendered sexuality as illustrated by the following four extracts:

Extract twenty eight: SM: So there are all of these sort of dangers; things could go wrong, could get pregnant, get in trouble, why do they still do it?
 E: Cos they want to act hard they wanna be [the] just [best] person
 SM: So you think it's more about looking a certain way rather than actually wanting to have sex?
 E: They wanna look strong they wanna look strong yeah
(Ethan, 390-393)

Extract twenty nine: G: Like saying that "I'm not a virgin" to all your friends; showing off and [the friends] seeing that he can [get] anyone he wants. And [any] girl he likes.
(Guy, 402-403)

Extract thirty: SM: Do you think erm.. young women, young men, ever want to have sex because of a sexual desire, or is it more for social reasons?

C: It's just 50:50
 SM: Can you explain that a bit?
 C: Like because of the desire they might like find it get pleasure out it, or they might just want to become popular
 SM: And what about for young women?
 C: Mmm mmm I'm not really sure about a girl
 SM: Do you think they experience sexual desire in the same way?
 C: Yeah they do cos they're not really that different, but..
(Christo, 204-214)

Extract thirty one:
 H: It sort of... it is based around the social, like if you do it, you're gonna like get sated for it, and if you don't do it, you still like get slated for it
 SM: Is it ever to do with a physical sexual desire in young women to do it? Does that ever come into it
 H: Not normally women no
(Hannah, 521-525)

Ethan and Guy position the object of sex as central to being male and importantly to demonstrating masculinity (Measor, 2000; Measor, 2006). Sex as a technology of self allows the young person to establish hegemonic masculinity and develop male status and subjectivity. In this sense, heterosexual encounters therefore, have the potential to affirm, but also to destabilise and threaten masculinity dependent on successful performance (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). The three extracts of talk from the young men demonstrate how sex is constructed as a technology of self for males in terms of social status via the conduit of verbal performance (Mac an Ghaill, 1994 Macvarish, 2010). Talking about successful sexual engagement allows them to be seen as strong and virile and able to attract whomever he chooses. Christo cites this aspect of sexuality, the verbal performance of hegemonic masculinity to peers, as a motivating factor as strong

as desire. However, central to the construction of hegemonic masculinity is the subordination of women (Connell, 1987). This is highlighted by Hannah who describes the contradictory demands placed on young women, whereby they are 'slated' whatever they do (Fine & McClelland, 2006). This appears to be due to the dominant versions of female sexuality available to young people that are heavily regulated and confined to specific acceptable versions (Morrissey & Higgs, 2006; Fine & McClelland, 2006).

3.3.2 Sex as Social Risk for Females

The sexual double standard has been widely researched and evidenced in discursive constructions of sexuality (Jackson & Cram, 2003). The likelihood of being labelled a 'slag' or getting a 'bad reputation' can exercise strong control over young women's experience of herself as a sexual subject and her sexual identity (Lees, 1993). This form of control appears to be ubiquitous and is used by both males and females to police the boundaries of female sexuality (Holland et al., 1998). For young men, sex as a technology of self represents an important milestone reached on the path to a successful masculinity, a gain in reputation and social status. For young women, sex as a technology of self is a risky strategy; treading a 'treacherous line' between either garnering a 'bad' reputation or conversely achieving the social status and confidence that is conferred from having a boyfriend. In the next extract, Jennifer explains what she sees as the benefits of being in a sexual relationship:

Extract thirty two: J: Well, erm.. just being with someone I guess.. someone you can talk to, and like some people whose, normally the boyfriend is also a really good friend to the person as well, and normally girls like to argue quite a lot so if that goes all wrong, you've got your boyfriend to talk to, and he'll back you up whatever happens
(Jennifer, 620-623)

Jennifer constructs a sexual relationship within a discourse of romantic monogamy that positions the male as 'protector' of the female, defending her

honour. In particular, the male is a 'really good friend', in lieu of unstable friendships. This relationship ideal is the legitimised route to sexual subjectivity and offers an empowered position. However this idealised version of sex and sexuality is not realised in lived experience as Jennifer goes on to explain:

Extract thirty three:

J: Yeah, if a boy's done something it's a good thing and like if a boy does something, they sort of congratulate him, and then they would turn around and sort of be horrible to the girl like "oh why you doing this" and then they might ask her can I do the same, and she would get loads of pressure from other boys

SM: Why is that do you think?

J: I don't think boys realise how much it hurts girls and I think like boys are very open about the topic more than girls and I think boys just mature a lot slower than girls. If girls have done a lot of stuff in the past it's a bad thing, a really bad thing, but if boys have done stuff it's okay

SM: Who says it's a bad thing

J: I dunno, it's just we just all seem to think it's okay, I mean girls if think, if a boy, if a boy does something girls thinks it's wrong, but our opinion doesn't really come out as strong as theirs, because we're not as immature and shout it out in class. But with them they will. And then people start to hear that and they think "oh maybe he's right"

(Jennifer, 316-324)

As highlighted in Jennifer's extract above, in direct contrast with sex serving as social currency for males, a construction of sex as a social risk for females was dominant in the interviews. In particular, when sex is 'known' by the peers and

friends. Sex is discursively constructed as having negative consequences in one of two ways. Firstly, sex was constructed as dangerous in terms of its physical outcome; typically pregnancy or disease, as already discussed. Secondly, and most pertinent to this section, sex was discursively constructed as being dangerous socially. Within this construction, the primary subject positions available to females were negative, the ways young women conformed to and resisted these positions is explored throughout this section.

Young men and women constructed a female sexuality that was heavily judged and subsequently persecuted. There were very particular conditions wherein female sex could be accepted but these were very rare for adolescents, as most constructed a version of acceptable female sex within traditional monogamous, long-term, committed relationships that, importantly, began after the young woman was sixteen:

- Extract thirty four:**
- E: Yeah cos Mina's gonna have all the hassle out of it whereas Layth's gonna have all the praise
- SM: What type of hassle will she get?
- E: Bullied by all the popular girls
- SM: Do you think that is definitely going to happen if she had sex?
- E: Probably
- SM: What could she do for that not to happen?
- E: Be sixteen, when you're supposed be at the proper age
- SM: So the age limit that is actually, it's alright for boys to be under the age limit but not for girls?
- E: yeah that's what they think yeah
- SM: But Layth will -
- E: He'll get praised
- (Ethan, 280-291)**

A discursive construction of female sexuality uses an explicit discursive strategy of law to legitimise this version of 'acceptable female sex', and the implicit

discursive strategy of hegemonic masculinity that constructs the normative male as sexually active from a young age. 'Appropriate' masculinity (as discussed in previous sections) relies on peer groups in order to allow measurement of masculine performance against peers. Thus, each young man's position can be established in relation to peer group competition which makes sharing performance stories essential to create and sustain a particular sexual and, therefore, masculine image. Conversely, Ethan's talk constructs the opposite version of sex for Mina, where the consequences are hostile exclusion by 'other' 'popular' girls; associating abstinence with popularity and social success. This construction appears throughout the interviews:

Extract thirty five:

- C: Yeah cos they're [girls] less up for having sex, cos they know if someone finds out they will be called names and judged... Well, if you're like in a relationship then they might not judge you, if you've been in a relationship for long time
- SM: How long have you got to be in a relationship for?
- C: In my opinion about six.. half a year
- SM: then it's okay?
- C: Yeah then you won't be judged.. maybe

(Christo, 195-201)

Acceptable conditions for female sex reproduce dominant discourses of monogamous, long-term, committed heterosexual dyads. Female sex is only possible within narrow parameters of a 'romantic' committed relationship, which perpetuates the idea that young women's primary motivation for sex is to achieve a relationship status. Females who occupy a subject position outside of this discourse by having sex within a short time period are 'called names and judged' (Holloway, 1984, 1989). This discursive construction denies the possibility of legitimate female sex outside of the long-term monogamous dyad; casual relationships for men are implicitly authorised, whilst female sex is contained within, and constrained by, responsibilities and reputation (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999)

The young women described the volatile process of negotiating feminine identity in relation to sexuality, as illustrated by Anna when asked what Mina (case vignette) might be worried about when anticipating first sexual experience:

- Extract thirty six:**
- A: Cos [she will] probably [be] worried about being talked about and thought about in the wrong way...
- SM: What do you mean the wrong way, what does that mean?
- A: Cos like, if you have sex with someone, and then like that other person tells, and that gets spread around, say in like school, then you get like a bad sort of reputation, I think, and people don't really, and that doesn't make school very nice for you
- SM: And do friends stop being friends over things like that?
- A: Yeah I think so cos friends as much as they can be your friends they can still judge you and also if not many people like you people might not want to hang around with someone who isn't liked cos they might become unliked as well so then you start to lose friends probably.
- (Anna, 90-98)**

Valerie Hey's (2002) research into girls' friendships in British secondary schools described girls who were learning to constitute their feminine subjectivities in conditions of surveillance, constituted through the socially coercive presence of the male gaze which endlessly seeks to position girls within it, through dominant discourses of what it constitutes to be a 'good' girl, therefore, reproducing unequal gender relations, as seen above and in the next extract:

- Extract thirty seven:**
- F: Erm.. their friends might turn, like.. Mainly on

the girls, their friends, she might be all alone,
cos all her friends are thinking she is a slag and
all that

(Fulmala, 240-241)

Kehily et al. (2002) assert that girls' friendships are a material relation of power as well as a technique for the regulation of normative gendered sexualities. In this way, certain versions of femininity are permitted – the friendship group is an arena for performative enactment of certain versions of femininity. Kitzinger (1989) suggests that discourses that are threatening to the status quo and, therefore, to those who benefit from it, will be strongly resisted and marginalised an illustration of which is offered below:

Extract thirty eight:

SM: And would she talk to anyone before
[considering a sexual relationship]

I: Maybe her friends but it depends what they'd
say cos they can, girls can turn their backs on
people when they say stuff like that

SM: Does that happen often

I: Well sometimes you can tell them something
and they'll just go spread it off to other people

(Ingrid, 169-173)

The three extracts from Anna, Fulmala and Ingrid construct unsafe spaces for young women to talk about sex. Hey (2002) argues that a key tool used by young women to regulate a girl from making claims to femininity, is by exclusion and talk. Young women are constructed as having no control over the 'knowledge' of their sexuality. Their relationships with other young women are constructed as precarious and easily damaged by challenges to traditional constructions of femininity. Females who engage in sexual activity threaten the status quo of acceptable femininity and are constructed as a 'slag', resulting in social exclusion from peers and abandonment from friends. Within these constructions, it is not the act of sex that is constructed as dangerous but the others' *knowledge* of the act. Female sex is tolerated if it is silent, however,

knowledge of female sex outside of traditional constructions is responded to with judgement and punishment, effectively governing the type of female subjectivity that is acceptable to the governing hegemonic masculine regime supporting the institution of marriage. Research by Kehily et al. (2002) suggest that girls use their friendships to develop and negotiate their identities as young women, however, this process is regulated by discourses of gendered power and inequality. This is understood here as a technology of governmentality; discourses of female sexual subjectivity outside of traditional parameters are marginalised and punished (Kitzinger, 1989), as highlighted by Hannah and Fulmala:

Extract thirty nine:

- H: Cos like some of my friends, like we went out a while ago, and one of my friends kissed a boy and her friend really liked this boy but then and yeah she had a go at her the next day, and then the same night one of my other friends gave a blow-job to this boy in a bush and the girl that liked him didn't know about that one, so she was hating on the one that kissed him, but she didn't right and then she eventually found out and then beat her up in the corridor
- SM: In school?
- H: Yeah and she wasn't even going out with him
(Hannah, 547-553)

Extract forty:

- F: They're probably; their friends might say it on facebook or something, cos a lot of things happen on facebook, like people bait people's stuff out and everything
- SM: What does that mean? Bait people out?
- F: Oh erm, like some people make groups, then they slag them off, yeah they'll diss them out
- SM: So they'll make a group about someone then slag them off?

F: yeah
SM: Does that happen often
F: Yeah
(Fulmala, 269-276)

Within Hannah's talk the young woman spoken about is perceived as 'giving' away sex to a male outside of a romantic committed dyad, in doing so resisting dominant constructions of female heterosexuality. The violent response to this is theorised by Holland et al., (1998) as the 'male in the head'. Social life operates within a gendered organisation of heterosexuality (Jackson, 2010). The 'male in the head' discourse states that in the school context (as in wider society), masculinity and femininity are constructed in dynamic opposition to each other; reproducing gender binaries. The achievement of conventional masculinity and femininity are mutually dependent on each other. That is, even when young people *'reject, resist or ignore the demands and constraints of dominant masculinity, they are still subject to the conventions of heteronormativity that privilege masculine meanings and desires and so regulate gendered meanings and practices'* (Holland et al., 1994: 156) one of which is to produce a femininity that constitutes and reproduces male dominance (Holland et al., 1992). The male in the head discourse, as explicated by Holland et al. (1994), seeks to disrupt the heterosexual dualisms of masculinity/femininity suggested by Butler (1993) by making the hidden power relations of heterosexuality visible through examination of the parts played by young people in reproducing male dominance. Strategies of resistance that are outside of conventional femininity, particularly those more public strategies, are unstable and, in this context, immediately counter-resisted in the public sphere, using social networking sites to discipline female sexual behaviour. Constructions of (or examples of) 'deviant' female sexuality, such as outside of a committed romantic relationship, or under the age of sixteen, result in within-group technologies of governmentality, particularly from other females, that actively resist such constructions. The 'male in the head' notion makes sense of this containment of female sexuality by other females, by highlighting the 'asymmetry, institutionalisation and regulatory power of heterosexual relations' (Holland et al., 1994: 157) that is internalised by young men and women. That is, women's empowerment through sexual subjectivity is

fiercely resisted by the internalised institutional power of heterosexual relations that regulates the expectations, meaning and practices of both men and women. These institutional practices reproduce and validate the dominant discourse of hegemonic masculinity by young people's use of sex as a technology of self to achieve maturity, adulthood, status and, therefore, power by performing according to traditional roles and expectations of male and female behaviour.

Holland et al., (1994) suggest that sexual reputations and loss of 'virginity' are interlocking narratives of loss and gain. For males, first sex intercourse is a sign of gaining 'manhood' through a woman's loss of virginity. Many cultures measure a man's honour on the purity of a woman, be it a daughter, sister, or fiancé. 'Honour', and with it masculine prestige and power, can be lost if she gains a negative sexual reputation. Although the woman cannot access power, prestige and agency through the use of her body, she is still in a position to 'destroy' it. Sexual behaviour/reputation is a negative attribute for women, whilst largely positive and masculine-affirming for males. Female sexuality is, therefore, a primary site of regulation within a masculine scaffold. Holland et al., (1994: 157) suggest that it is the construction of femininity, which is defined "*by masculinity, through the heterosexual contact*" (emphasis in original). The apparently natural, and neutral, male/female dichotomy conceals the insidious power the "male in the head" holds over evaluation, and subsequent regulation, of female and male sexual behaviour.

It has been suggested that the popular media message offered to young women of 'post-feminist girl' for whom sex is 'fun' and desirable (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2004), as propagated in the media, is in direct contrast to the traditional 'good girl' construction that is ubiquitous in Western culture, and which carries with it huge responsibility and restrictions (Fine & McClelland, 2006). This contradiction means that young women are situated in a volatile position, surrounded by boundaries and cautions that police the line of reputation (Kehily, 2004; Kitzinger, 2005), effectively creating a dichotomy between desire and respectability (Griffin, 2004b). Jackson and Weatherall (2010) suggest an effect of this for young women is to silence their talk with one another about sexuality, and sexual pleasure/enjoyment, reinforcing it as a missing discourse of desire (Fine, 1988). I

suggest a further implication of this is the denial of sexual subjectivity, and, thus, knowledge of oneself and one's desires and dislikes, therefore, making sexual safety precarious and unreliable.

CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY, EVALUATION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter will review the research presented within this thesis in its entirety. Firstly the research questions will be reviewed and discussed with the analysis presented as a narrative. The research project will then be critically evaluated. The final section will look at the results of this body of research and what affect it may have for clinical practice, both currently and also going forward; with a look at what future research could or should be conducted as a follow on to the work presented here.

4.1 Research Questions and Aims Revisited

The principal aim of this study was to explore how young people talked their sexual subjectivities into being, and how those subjectivities were influenced by power and discourse. The aim was reflected in the three research questions which will now be explored:

1. Identify and examine the young peoples' discursive constructions of sex and relationship education (SRE).

This aim was addressed through the examination of three discursive constructions participants used to describe their SRE experience. SRE was constructed as protective, inadequate and incomplete and as unrealistic and incongruent with lived experience. Each of these constructions offered different subject positions to the young people and had different implications in terms of opportunities for action.

Within a construction of *SRE as protective*, the young people constructed SRE as essential for their physical health and safety. As such, young people were positioned as 'at risk' from sex, requiring specific knowledge of how to manage the dangers of sex. Within this construction the object of sex is biological, innate and necessitates regulation. It is conversely and simultaneously both embedded in corporeality and yet divorced from embodied subjectivity – requiring external intervention to 'know' the experience and, thus, dangers (Hirst, 2008; Allen, 2007). SRE is a powerful arbiter of young peoples' experience and not the young

people themselves (Aggleton & Crewe, 2005). This has implications for 'knowing' and understanding one's own desire, and denies young people the subject position of an actively desiring sexual subject who is motivated by pleasure seeking or emotional connections, rather than avoidance of disease (Allen, 2007).

However, access to this sexual 'knowledge' was problematized by the young people within the construction of *sex as inadequate and incomplete*. This positioned young people as knowledgeable sexual subjects with agency, seeking out 'missing' knowledge. Nevertheless, this construction remained within a neo-liberal discourse of knowledge acquisition (Harris, 2004; Walkerdine, 2004) that positioned the young people as rational decision-making subjects. The emotional, physical and contextual aspects of negotiating sexual experience are reduced to knowledge acquisition, and there is an assumption that knowledge will be translated into practice without difficulty (Allen, 2005). This has implications for those young people who do have difficulty; for example making the 'wrong' choice, feeling coerced or failing to live up to masculine or feminine standards.

The construction of SRE as protective, shows young people perceive sexual knowledge to be necessary to engage in sexual activity. This construction presents a knowledge of sex as an individual experience and problem (Moore, 2012), obscuring the dynamic and relational nature of sexual encounters. However, in their construction of *SRE as unrealistic and incongruent with lived experience*, the young people actively resist this knowledge of sex. The young people problematize what they experience as an unrealistic negative bias that is incongruent with their lived experience. The social and cultural context in which young people construct their developing identities and sexualities is one that is perceived as sexualised (Holland & Thomson, 2010), with an expectation of a knowing sexualised self, for which SRE fails to prepare. Sexual knowledge here is still positioned as a pre-requisite for 'successful' sexual experience; however, the young people included took their own sexual knowledges gleaned from other sources, and which involved more than risk-avoidance, to evaluate the SRE programme. In this research, the young people problematized SRE's overwhelming negative bias and felt the 'positive' aspects of sex were missing.

However, their talk was characterised by an absence of language to story or conceptualise what might constitute 'positive' (Fine & McClelland, 2006). The suggestions of 'having a baby' and 'closing the relationship' reproduced dominant hegemonic versions of masculine and feminine sexuality. The young people called for a more nuanced and complex understanding of sexuality that included a picture of sex that was physically and emotionally pleasurable, having emotional components and social implications. Building upon Michelle Fine's 1980's work on the missing discourse of desire for young women, Allen (2005) suggests the sexual knowledge young people are increasingly asking for could be characterised as a discourse of 'erotics', which includes discussion on intimacy, desire, pleasure and reciprocity.

2. Examine and discuss the effect of the SRE discourses and teaching practices, as constructed by the young people, on emerging sexual and gender identities.

This aim was addressed through the examination of two discursive constructions that participants used to describe their perceptions of young people. Young peoples' sexual subjectivities were constructed as teen parents and as managing the 'double standard'. Both offered different subject positions to the young people and had different implications in terms of opportunities for action.

The construction of young people as teen parent was ubiquitous in all participant interviews. Pregnancy was positioned as the high-risk and usually inevitable outcome of sexual intercourse, ratifying biological and risk discourses of adolescent sexuality. A universal understanding within this construction was that the responsibility, culpability and consequence rested predominantly with the female. This construction heavily featured reproductive and biological essentialist discourses that physically situate pregnancy with the female, thus, reducing her embodied sexual experience to a site of reproduction. In terms of SRE, pregnancy is the abhorrent consequence of sexual activity. It is argued that discourses of neo-liberal autonomy, economic growth and 'empowered' women, within the school system and wider society, serve to 'unstitch' discourses of desire from reproductivity to ensure a young and flexible (female) workforce

(Harris, 2005). The [abhorrent] consequence of pregnancy is embodied by females, positioning them as irresponsible. Alongside a discourse of the self as enterprise, whereby young people are producing themselves as successful subjects, it is suggested in this thesis that 'successful' femininity is not only being the 'good' girl but also the 'responsible and successful' girl in an economic sense. Therefore, young women are treading a treacherous line in becoming neo-liberal autonomous subjects (which includes the presentation of oneself as both a desiring subject and desirable object), and succeeding the traditional sense of achieving power through a romantic relationship by being a passive and innocent sexual subject.

3. Identify and examine how young people construct their expectations of sexual relations and consider the possibilities that are opened or closed due to the available discourses of sex and sexuality.

This aim was addressed through the examination of two discursive constructions that participants used to describe sex. Sex was constructed as functional and transformative for young people but also as a social risk for females. Both of these offered different subject positions to the young people and had different implications in terms of opportunities for action.

A general theme running through the interviews described sex as a technology of self, whereby sex operates to bring into being certain subjectivities that are functional or transformative to a young person's life. Within the interviews these included *sex as a technology of self to achieve maturity, confidence and social status*, which were constructed as signals of membership the self-governing adult community. Sex as a technology of self draws on the discourse of 'self as enterprise', whereby the autonomous neo-liberal subject is responsible for successful self-management of social practices (McNay, 2009). In this context, sex is employed as a technology of self to achieve *knowledge and power* for males within a hegemonic discourse of masculinity. Sex is constructed as a positive (and required) affirmation of masculinity, essential to achieve status within peer groups. Young men are offered subject positions that fit with a traditional masculine ideal of prolific and emotionally detached sexuality (Mac an

Ghaill, 1994; Holland et al., 1998) that offer little space to deviate from the ideal of penetrative sex. This dominant discourse of male sexuality silences alternative accounts, such as wanting to delay sexual intercourse (Measor, 2006). Young men are, therefore, denied masculine subjectivities that offer choice and difference; 'failure' to meet the ideal of sex could present disappointment and anxiety, resulting in a threat to their developing masculine subjectivity (Measor, 2006).

Sex was constructed as a technology of self to attain knowledge and power through experiential learning; this positions sex as a pragmatic approach to accessing 'relevant' knowledge about sex. Within this construction of sex, knowledge and experience of sex was a source of social currency for males, making sexual intercourse a valid goal with the self as enterprise discourse. Also, within this construction, both males and females positioned the object of sex as impervious to definition, practice or rehearsal (Moore, 2012), it is 'unknowable' unless one actively engaged in sexual intercourse. This negates the aim of SRE to 'prepare' young people to manage sex and sexual experiences in safe ways. If sex is perceived as 'unknowable' unless personally experienced (Tolman, 1994; Kidger 2005; Maxwell, Aggleton & Emmerson, 2009), then efforts to prepare could be experienced as appear unconvincing and even futile; particularly when taking into consideration a context of deep scepticism by the young people of the relevance and adequacy of the SRE content, as illustrated in the analysis chapter.

Sex as a social risk for females constructs young women as split between two positions, sex is also seen as a technology of self to achieve maturity, status and power, albeit through the conduit of male association; however, for females this must be a secret process. Both young women and men reproduced moral conservative discourses of 'acceptable' female sexuality that proscribe sex within a long-term heterosexual dyad above the age of consent (Monk, 2001; Durham, 1991). Females tread a 'treacherous' line to achieve 'maturity' and status from being in a relationship, whilst running the risk of being 'found out'. This presents conflicting subject positions for young women to occupy; dominant discourses of traditional femininity as passive to male power, innocent and reproductive,

construct an acceptable femininity as 'responsible' and abstaining until appropriate conditions present (Kehily, 1999; McRobbie, 2007). However, a discourse of 'self as enterprise' (McNay, 2009) encourages autonomy and success which, within a hegemonic heterosexual patriarchal society, means becoming part of a heterosexual couple dyad to infer power and status, and being a desirable object (Kehily, 2009; Tolman, 2002). Females are engaged in treading this line in the context of a construction of 'sex as knowledge and power' for males. The construction of sex as knowledge and power features the 'male sexual drive' discourse that positions males at the mercy of their internal biological sexual drives, constantly wanting and ready for sex, and authorises a version of masculinity that privileges public performance of (hetero)sexuality (Macvarish, 2010). Therefore, the risk for females is increased, with male public performance of virility likely to destroy the female reputation, thus, they will fall outside the lines of 'acceptable' femininity.

4.1.1 Additional Constructions

During step eight of the analytic process (see appendix L), the analysis was refined to make a coherent dialogue, with constructions either integrated or separated where appropriate. Once this was done I took the decision to stop analysing due to time constraints, but also having reached a coherent, informative stage, and having answered the research questions posed. Additional themes that featured in the participants talk were not included in the final analysis, due to space, time and desire to develop a congruent picture. Although this is a typical part of discourse analytic process, whereby not all themes are pursued (Parker, 1992; Potter & Weatherall, 1997), further analysis / interrogation of less coherent issues raised using a Foucauldian informed discourse analysis would add to, and expand, the constructions. Appendix N shows some of the early construction structures with additional themes that were eventually integrated or discarded.

In particular, within the 'sex as social currency' construction, a wider exploration of the fragility of social relationships, and the market economy that school appeared to be, would be useful to examine. Both males and females highlighted the need to conceal "true" feelings, thoughts or concerns about sex and sexuality:

males in order to perpetuate the idea of an active sexual subject, and females to preserve the image of a passive and desired sexual object, thus, retaining power and status. However, power is a dynamic process; understanding the wider context of oppression and resistance within the school system, and how gender intersects with class and ethnicity, may have enabled consideration of more nuanced issues and instances of power and resistance within the constructions.

A construction of 'sex as hidden' (see appendix N) was explored to some extent within the 'sex as social risk for females' construction, however, young people constructed sex as 'hidden' in many contexts. The social risk for females and subsequent secrecy around sexual behaviour was dominant and featured in all young people's interviews, and was subsequently integrated into the analysis. Nonetheless, the perception that sex must be hidden from adults, teachers, and peers was present for most of the young people (see appendix O for example extracts). Inclusion of this wider construction would have given opportunity to examine the power differential between adult/child, and not just male/female. This highlights another binary dichotomy, which intersects with gender in a nexus of power relations that produces knowledges of acceptable sexuality for children. Although fascinating, and undoubtedly enriching, to the understanding of adolescents' constructions of sex and sexuality, these issues have been explored elsewhere (Monk, 1998; Kehily, 2002; Gibson, 2009), and it was essential to remain focused on the dominant constructions of developing gender and sexual identity.

In relation to the above construction was the influence of family and peer group. The power of the peer group was enormous and featured in most of the constructions. However, although interviews explicitly talked about family influence, (i.e., when discussing the fictional couple, specific questions were asked about what family members might think, say, do in response to various scenarios. See appendix C for questions), constructions of familial responses were not included in the final analysis. The power of the family was acknowledged by young people, however, this was usually in the context of keeping 'sex a secret' so as not to disappoint or anger parents. In addition, young people also took a meta-view on the impact of 'poor parenting' on a young

person's sense of self and their subsequent sexual behaviour. Understanding the construction of 'poor parenting' may have further illuminated the idea of 'judgement' and how that is performed and perpetuated.

4.2 Evaluation and Critical Review

4.2.1 Epistemology and Methodology

The epistemological position I adopted in this research was feminist informed post-structuralism. A central principle of feminism is recognised as a commitment to the problematizing and transformation of unjust gender relations and inequality. This task presents a dilemma when working with post-structural tools which typically divorce 'objective truth' and 'neutrality' from phenomena being observed. As such, it is argued that the realities of gendered lives cannot be fully accessed or evaluated. To address this, reflexivity allowed for power relations to be traced through the research process and my responses to it (English & Irving, 2008), unpicking what 'knowledge' is contingent upon and how the research process has been constituted (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002) and intersected by power and my own subject positions (Willig, 2008). Reflexivity will be explored in section 4.2.3.1.

A qualitative approach was taken to analysis, using post-structuralist approach to discourse analysis informed by the work of Foucault (1977) and Carabine (2001). The criticisms levelled at qualitative analysis state a lack of objectivity, poor reliability and validity. However, these criticisms are rooted in positivist traditions relying on realist assumptions that the world is directly 'observable' and, therefore, 'knowable', rather than constructed through language, as assumed by post-structuralism (Parker, 1992).

4.2.2 Influence of Culture and Religion

As mentioned in chapter two, the cultural context for each participant was unique. A particular difference was religious affiliation. At least four of the young people reported strong family religious beliefs in their interviews. Hannah's family were Jehovah's Witness, Devya's Sikh, Christo's Catholic and Fulmala's Muslim. The

young people's talk featured no overt examples of religious influence over their lives (such as, condemnation of pre-marital sex on religious grounds), and no attempt was made in the interviews to assess levels of faith or family commitment to religious ideals. Nonetheless, religious beliefs around sexual and romantic behaviour held by family and community members, irrespective of strength, would contribute to the knowledges and discourses available to young people when constructing their experience in the interviews. Sex, gender, and sexuality are not independent of other social variables, but rather, are subject to political, economic relationships and social forces such as class, ethnicity, and religion (Vance, 1984; Weeks, 1986). Foucault (1980) asserts that power is productive, produced and reproduced in response to structures of oppression and resistance that are fluid and interconnected (Nayak, 2001). The multiple interfaces of race, gender social class and sexuality dynamically interact and transform one another (Nayak, 2001; Elley, 2011). Ethnicity, religion and class are pivotal locations in the development of sexual beliefs (Bragg, 2006). Ideas about, and ideals of, sexual behaviours, selection of partners, and appropriate courting rituals are influenced, not just by ideas of gender, sexuality and the roles of men and women (Manderson, 1999), but are dictated by cultural, religious and family beliefs (Weeks, Singer, Grier, & Schensul, 1996). At first glance, the young people constructed themselves within binary oppositional positions, as male/female, adult/child, however, I suggest that these constructions are more nuanced, influenced by their cultural, religious and socio-economic contexts. The two young Asian women were not simply constructing themselves as sexual and gendered subjects, but were constructing subjectivities influenced by the experience of growing up "Asian" in a predominantly white society. Hannah's talk constructions of female violence may have been borne out of religious commitment to peace and forgiveness. There is a raft of research that maps the impact of socio-economic status (Belnkinsop et al., 2004; Wellings et al., 2001), ethnicity (Bradbury & Williams, 1999), and religion (Coleman & Testa, 2008) onto sexual behaviour and on how each of these contribute to young people's understandings and values regarding intimate relationships (Allen, 2001). However, this particular research set out to understand the experience of SRE and the impact that had on emerging sexual and gender identities, and how that was operationalized in their discourses. The impact that culture and religion had

on shaping discourse was not a question I focused on in my analysis. However, it is certain that culture, religion, ethnicity and class, just as family dynamics (Blenkinsop et al., 2004) and parental communication styles (Kirkman et al., 2005), are productive in young peoples' constructions of their developing sexual and gender identities.

4.2.3 Quality of the Research

Reliability and validity (and consequent potential to replicate) are the standards by which quantitative research is evaluated (Taylor, 2001b). However, within a post-structuralist epistemology, researchers do not lay claim to producing one truth, but rather offer one interpretation this unique data set that is partial, culturally and historically situated and relative to my own experience, world view and values. As such, the analysis is provisional and contestable (Burr, 2003). However, Burman (2004) asserts that a qualitative methodology does not exclude research from evaluation of validity and reliability. To this end suggestions of coherence and readers' evaluation of the analytic material by Potter (1996) are considered to evaluate reliability and validity.

I have attempted to offer a coherent story throughout this research by reference to theories of sexuality, youth and the convergent pedagogies that inform such knowledges. I have related analytic findings to wider literature and have offered critique and reflections. The use of extracts offer the reader opportunity to evaluate the suitability and relevance of themes and constructions presented, which Potter (1996) suggests is crucial to evaluation of validity. I have attempted to make explicit how I arrived at the results from the data set. To make this more transparent a worked example of a transcript is included in appendix P.

Reflexivity is a crucial element for assessing quality of research (Antaki et al., 2003). To this end, the reflexive process is explored thoroughly below.

4.2.4 Reflexivity

As discussed in chapter two, reflexivity is an essential criterion for evaluating the quality of research. This particular narrative about young people and sexuality is not an objective or complete account but, rather, has been shaped by my own

'situated and partial perspective' (Allen, 2005: 15). The questions I asked, those I did not, the words I chose to code the initial interview scripts, the connections I made between the codes, interpretation of the data have all, in some part, been constituted through my own historical, cultural and professional lenses. I considered how these contexts and subsequent 'lenses' may have influenced the research. The aim of locating myself within this project is to acknowledge that the findings cannot be separated from their means of production and my own implication in the process (Lather, 1991). Harper (2003) suggests an approach to develop a critically reflexive position to discourse analysis by examining knowledge-making practices linked to historical, cultural and professional contexts. Willig (2001) distinguishes between personal reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity.

4.2.4.1 Epistemological Reflexivity

Self-discipline, or self-regulation, is a key concept in this research; I want to examine how I was affected by anonymous and 'compelling gaze of the field of gender' (English & Irving, 2008: 268) and the field of Foucauldian informed post structuralism. It is only at the end of this research process that I feel confident in my understanding of many theoretical concepts, particularly those outlined by Foucault. A concern throughout this research was that I might be slipping into essentialist thinking. There is a close affinity between Foucault's concept of problematisation and engaging in qualitative research, both require abstraction and the disruption of socially constructed and accepted meanings and, therefore, challenge one's own thinking.

To this end, the focus groups were an invaluable opportunity to interrogate my understandings of post-structural discourse analysis. The focus group interview schedule was heavily informed by post-structural researchers in the field of sexuality and as such defined a set of ideas and agendas. By conducting the focus groups, I was able to interrogate my own assumptions about what the research should look like in terms of FDA. The process of conducting this research has elucidated my own subjectivity in ways I had not expected. Having the experience of interrogating my own assumptions and beliefs, and also reflect

upon the pressure of producing something useful to contribute to the field of gender studies allowed me to become genuinely curious in the interviews.

One of the key challenges concerned the development of the researcher in accordance to the needs and ideals of the school system. Although the head of SRE was incredibly accommodating of the research and valued the aims, the timetabled school structure was inflexible and resulted in time pressures. Despite liaising with the school for twelve months prior to the interviews, they were eventually conducted over a three day period. As a result a detailed reflection on the interview process, and subsequent alteration of interview questions, expansion of key themes and concepts that would have been afforded by transcribing after each interview was not possible. I feel more detailed reflection on the questions I asked, and the way I responded to young people would have helped me to make transparent power relations and assumptions at work during the interactions.

In the interview sessions, I often felt a strong desire to avoid colluding with powerful discourses of sexism and oppression by 'naming' the inequality (Patel, 2003) as I would in my clinical practice. The transition from therapist to researcher when doing qualitative research is a complicated and blurred process. My reflections (as noted in reflexive journal appendix Q) after many sessions centred around my fears of collusion as 'powerful' adult exploring the discourses and issues young people were discussing, and often problematizing, and being unable to take a critical stance. Although the research aimed to centre young peoples' views, my position as an adult professional female effectively asking them questions were not conducive to conditions of equality, despite efforts to build rapport.

4.2.4.2 Personal Reflexivity

I am a twenty-eight year old white woman who is (hetero)sexual. Although I identify as (hetero)sexual I borrow a term from Thomas (2000) to describe myself as being 'straight with a twist', which is beautifully highlighted in Allen (2005: 16) as: heterosexual with 'the twist' being my recognition of the 'fluidity and diversity of sexual identities' in tandem with my genuine political and

theoretical commitment to decentring (hetero)sexuality. I am also working-class, a practicing Catholic and grew up in a government-identified 'deprived' area within a city in the North-West of England. Growing up, roles were very gendered and as such were oppressive and restrictive to both males and females. My own gendered subjectivity was constructed within the context of the powerful and visible institutions of the Catholic Church and a series of convent schools. When analysing the data my historical and cultural lens coloured the narratives I was drawn to in terms of inequality and oppression. The reflexive journal and supervision were helpful in making these transparent.

It has taken until my late twenties for me to identify as a feminist and understand the implications of that position and, importantly, to let go of the assumptions it disintegrates. This experience was galvanised by the access to feminist theory and knowledge afforded to me in my privileged position as a clinical psychology trainee, and in particular this research. I have always been aware of the formative and subjectifying nature of education, however, I previously did not have the language to 'problematise' or name my sense of unfairness and powerlessness at the structural inequality and prejudice against working class people, and particularly against working class women. I feel fundamentally changed as a psychologist, a researcher and as a woman but feel it is only now, at the end of the process, that I can genuinely take a post-structuralist perspective, conduct the interviews and interrogate the data without essentialist prejudice or bias.

4.3 Research Process and Ethics.

4.3.1 Ethical Considerations

A key ethical issue throughout this research process was the concern that this research was adding to the scrutiny, surveillance and, therefore, regulation of young people and their sexual lives. I attempted to circumvent this to some extent by centring the young people's voice and their constructions of SRE, as opposed to interviewing teachers or reviewing policy documents, thereby privileging their version of the truth.

4.3.2 Recruitment.

A fundamental methodological foundation of this research was to give young people a principal role as subjects rather than objects of study (France, 2004), under the premise that richer and more valid insights into young peoples' lives are accessible only through engagement with them (Valentine, 1999). By exclusively including young people in the research it was hoped that young peoples' views and understandings would be centred within the research. However, although teachers and other adults did not directly participate, the research was heavily contingent upon their influence and needs: the young people were required to get signed parental consent to participate; I had to negotiate with various teachers to agree young people could be excused from lessons and, finally, the interviews themselves were physically situated on the school grounds and within 55 minute lesson time-slots. Out of one hundred and eighty three students fifteen returned parental consent slips. I had anticipated poor uptake and suggested that I join form-sessions or an assembly to give some background information about the project to orient young people to its aims. However, the head of SRE felt this would be difficult to organise. In lieu, I wrote letters to each form tutor giving an overview of the research and thanking them for handing out the letters I had provided.

Although this methodology positions young people as making their own sense of the world and their location in it (Kehily, 2007) the young peoples' experience of participation was subject to adult defined structures, processes and authority (Allen, 2009). The focus groups were helpful in addressing some of these issues. They provided the opportunity for the young people to be in a majority group in relation to me (Harper, 2012), I explicitly stated my position as there to listen to their views and ideas. It was hoped that privileging the young peoples' collective expertise would redress the power imbalance. Young people were given the opportunity to explore the research topics in the group session before committing to the individual interviews. This meant that they were able to have an experience of what it would be like to talk about such topics, perhaps generating food for thought, and certainly bringing the idea that I was genuinely interested in their thoughts and understandings (Burman, 1994). This hopefully provided an

impetus for them to consider and reflect on what their thoughts and understandings actually were (Frith, 2000).

4.3.3 Influence of the Case Vignettes

Use of the case vignettes proved invaluable in terms of generating discussion that was de-personalised and, as such, offered freedom to offer opinions without taking ownership. The vignette was deliberately vague:

Mina and Layth are fourteen years old and have been going out for a while and are thinking of having sex with each other.

However, the fictional characters did have a specific age of fourteen. This age is quite clearly below the age of consent and yet the vignette states that the young couple are considering having sex. This could potentially send a message to participants that underage sex is condoned. The choice to make Mina and Layth's age fourteen was seriously considered. However, the purpose of accessing a younger cohort was to gain an insight into their developing sexualities. Using fictional characters that were not in the same age range may have resulted in participants imagining what they consider appropriate behaviour for sixteen year olds, not themselves. In addition, I did not want to perpetuate the idea that to talk to young people openly and honestly about sexuality will encourage sexual behaviour (Allen, 2007). The aim was to generate honest discussions, and so it was important to highlight the real dilemmas and considerations the fictional young couple would be faced with. The questions asked around the vignette (see interview schedule in appendix C) were designed to be as "curious" (Minuchin, 1999) as possible in order to generate genuine understandings and ideas from the young person's perspective, therefore, I had to suspend all judgments regarding appropriateness of underage sex. However, I was able to explore those very issues with the young people by having the example of Mina and Layth.

4.4 Summary and Implications

Overall, young people positioned sex as an object of significant consequence for their lives. This fits with UK sex education programmes' neo-liberal framework,

which also positions sex as an object of consequence for young people, in terms of negative outcomes of disease and pregnancy (Allen, 2005; Jackson, 2010; Lewis & Knijn, 2003). As an object of such consequence, sex as a technology of self was used to achieve social success, which reproduces and reflects dominant discourse of self as enterprise (McNay, 2009). Sex is used as a social 'tool' to achieve 'confidence' and 'status' and to signal 'maturity' (Reynolds, 2010). As such it remains in the social realm of material possibility for the enterprising subject to 'use' appropriately making the 'correct' choices. However, in doing this, sexual-subjectivities are marginalised: sex is divorced from embodied corporeal experience and is instead constructed as a commodity (Nash, 1997). As such, there is no way to recognise or quantify sexual experience, making sexual practice an unknown and subsequently unsafe space. The thin descriptions of sex and sexual experience disseminated by the SRE programme, as constructed by the young people in this study, fail to take into account the complicated and diverse lived experience of young people. The subjectivities described by the young people fit with a neo-liberal discourse of autonomous and enterprising individual who is managing social practices successfully, with sex commodified into another tool for the autonomous enterprising self to use for 'successful' self-management.

SRE is constructed as inadequate and incongruent with young peoples' lived realities. By ignoring or denying young peoples' sexuality we are denying them the opportunity to develop an embodied sexual subjectivity that is knowable and understandable (Allen, 2007). Denying and pathologising adolescent sexuality, in the context of a highly sexualised and mobile culture (Harris, 2005), serves to push 'sex' into hidden spaces, where the meaning of sex for young people is transformed. This is directly at odds with the overtly sexualised culture that young people inhabit; pervasive media and cultural messages propagate a neo-liberal message about autonomy expressed through consumer choice, including sexuality, whereby young women are expected to produce themselves as both desirable objects and desiring subjects (Harris, 2004), with young men positioned as insatiable consuming subjects. Sex education is delivered within a neo-liberal framework that promotes individual autonomy and self-regulation to make the 'right' choices with regard to sex, in order to avoid the wholly negative

consequences. The young people in this study resisted the construction of sex as negative, instead re-framing sex as a technology of self, a practice that can bring about a particular form of subjectivity. The subjectivities described by the young people fit with a neo-liberal discourse of autonomous and enterprising individual who is managing social practices successfully. Within this discourse of sex as technology of self,; sex is commodified into another tool for the autonomous enterprising self to use for 'successful' self-management. It appeared that, although the young people were critical of the biological risk-averse discourse of sexuality, they were unable to construct an alternative embodied positive sexuality.

The construction of sex as a technology of self may be of particular interest to clinical psychologists researching and working in the field of sexuality. As many researchers before have identified (e.g. Allen, 2007; Spencer, Maxwell & Aggleton, 2008; Moore, 2012), there is a difference between SRE rhetoric and the delivered content. A discourse of 'empowerment' uses a neo-liberal discourse to encourage 'rational' decision making to make the 'right' choices to avoid negative consequences of sex. However, though young people constructed themselves as knowledgeable sexual subjects that evaluated SRE as inadequate and incongruent with their experience, they appropriated the neo-liberal discourse of enterprising self to 'use' sex to achieve the ratified version of the capable and successful (enterprising) self. This has implications for the validity of the SRE message as understood by young people, negating the curriculum.

It appears that constructions of young people in wider society as; dangerous; as a means of production; a potential work-force; potential welfare users, are often based on assumptions of economics and health (Monk, 1998; Monk, 2001) which suggest that young people require regulation in order to be safe, and to be productive. Regulation is hard-line and fails to acknowledge the complex and complicated nature of their lives. The regulation is organised through a nexus of power relations that serve to oppress or silence young peoples' experience and lived reality. Young people's talk constructed knowledgeable and sceptical social agents, who are aware of the link between knowledge and power and are trying

to resist it by re-appropriating knowledge (and, therefore, power) for themselves. There is such a focus on sex as a functional transformative entity that young people resist the negative construction, appropriating and transforming it for themselves, to obtain power and access to privileged knowledge and adult worlds.

4.4.1 Implications for the Concept of SRE and Future Research

This research shows a complicated picture of young people constructing SRE and the knowledge it provides as valuable, whilst rejecting many of its claims. In exploring the discourses and practices through which young people construct their sexual subjectivities in the context of SRE, this thesis has attempted to make gender and power relations that mediate and intersect sex education in school transparent. Through their talk, young people construct themselves as 'enterprising', aiming to succeed. People navigate the risks of sex in order to compete in the market economy of school where social status is a key currency (Marshall, 1996; Sears, 1992). Young people construct knowledge and experience as affording social power, with sex as the conduit to achieve this. Sex as experiential learning was a powerful construction as it positioned the young person as taking control of being disadvantaged by inappropriate sexuality education content. As such, SRE was successful in creating a neo-liberal subject that is enterprising, however, sexual safety could be compromised by disengagement with the messages of SRE, as they are deemed inappropriate by young people (Allen, 2007). Although young people are not 'redefining' the dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity, they are redefining the use of sex to achieve these things, transforming it into a powerful tool.

Spencer, Maxwell and Aggleton (2008) have highlighted that, whilst promoting an 'empowering' rhetoric, SRE programmes continue to be shaped by moral-conservative and risk-averse discourses. To truly adopt an empowerment rhetoric would mean viewing young people as sexual subjects with agency, which would include involving young people in the decision making regarding SRE agenda setting. The structural and time obstacles that myself and the head of SRE faced in organising the groups and interviews gives a glimpse of the priority SRE is afforded. SRE as a lesson is marginalised (Forrest, Strange, Oakley,

2000) in terms of time, space and resources, which also has implications to how it is viewed by young people and, thus, the credibility of its message. Young people constructed themselves as sceptical of the SRE programme's motivations and messages.

The focus groups were initially used to address the imbalance of power relations through inviting young people to co-author the interview schedule (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) and for young people to introduce themes that have greater personal concern (Frith, 2000). Although focus groups did generate knowledge of participants own language and concerns, there was significant within-group regulation of conversation topics, this was reported at one to one interviews when almost all of the young people reported feeling silenced by fear of judgement. They also stated that although they initially felt somewhat uncomfortable discussing issues of sex and sexuality in a group context (Kelley & Byrne, 1992), they felt the experience was enlightening in terms of hearing one another's opinions, which they rarely get opportunity to do. Due to constraints of time and resources, this thesis did not explore the focus group data in great detail. However, I think detailed exploration would provide a rich understanding of how power and regulation operate, particularly in light of the research findings. Specifically, it would be interesting to formally analyse the impact of the focus groups on the young peoples' understanding of sex and sexuality, as all of the young people reported a change in their personal view of the issues discussed. In particular, young people cited the case vignette as thought-provoking and novel, and appreciated having the opportunity to consider some of the wider implications of sex and sexuality.

4.4.2 Practical Implications for SRE Providers

What young people learn in sexuality education, for example, around safer sex practices to avoid STI infection, is not always put into practice. Within the sexuality education literature the term 'knowledge/practice gap' is used to describe this trend (Allen, 2007). Young people's own conceptualisations of their sexual knowledge, subjectivities and practice in this research indicated how the current pedagogy and delivery of SRE within heteronormative and gendered discourses constrained and contained their understanding, and development, of

embodied sexual subjectivities. Further to the implications and recommendations for the conceptualisation and pedagogy of SRE, I explicate some practical implications for current SRE providers:

One: Style of Teaching

As mentioned above, SRE is taught within an assessment and achievement framework (Alldred & David, 2007), which contributes to the construction of safe sex practices as a matter of knowledge acquisition (Harris, 2004; Walkerdine, 2004). This approach to teaching is confirmed by the didactic nature of SRE sessions that young people reported. The positive feedback about the focus groups and the case vignettes, with regard to generating discussion, hearing other people's ideas and thinking about consequences and dilemmas, suggests that a more interactive approach to considering issues of sex and sexuality would be helpful. For example, using a case vignette to generate discussion would allow young people to talk into being the dilemmas, expectations and consequences potentially associated with a range of issues around developing sexuality. This would offer an effective framework for fostering analytic thinking and critical reflection (Rogow & Haberland, 2005). However, this approach would require a broader consideration of what constitutes sexual health behaviour; outside of the risk avoidance that currently dominates sex education pedagogy (Allen, 2005; Jackson, 2010; Lewis & Knijn, 2003).

Two: Call for Complexity – Exploring the Wider Issues & Implications of Sexual Behaviour

Young people's construction of SRE as incomplete and inadequate and as incongruent with lived reality, suggests that a more complex understanding of wider issues associated with sex and sexuality is required (Allen, 2005, 2007). Moving SRE content from risk avoidance and simple linear cause and effect information (Measor et al., 2000; Hagquist & Starrin, 1997) would involve exploring social, emotional and psychological aspects of sexual development. The impact of which, could be a reduction in the mind-body split in SRE (Paechter, 2004) and exploration of embodied experience of sex and sexuality. Acknowledging young people as sexual subjects with embodied sexual experience would serve to disrupt current moral-conservative constructions of

young people as either innocent or vulnerable, both requiring regulation, instead constructing them as active agents (Allen, 2007). However, incorporating acknowledgement of embodied sexual experience for young people into current SRE content would be contentious, not least for cultural and religious reasons (Jackson & Weatherall, 2010). Broadening the scope of SRE content to include consideration of relationship issues such as: reasons young people decide to engage in sex, different contexts that contribute to decision making, reflection about possible family and peer responses, gives the opportunity to critically reflect and articulate constructions and implications. Butler (1990) and McNay (2009) highlight the importance of embodied agency through discourse; the repeated 'inscription' of symbolic norms through performativity produces subjectivity. In the process of doing this, marginalised and dominant constructions are embodied (Bryant & Schofield, 2007). This situates sex in the social, psychological sphere, and not only as a process of 'appropriate' decision making (McNay, 2009).

Three: Naming and Exploring Issues of Gender

This research indicated a very present experience of gender binaries and inequalities. I suggest that taking a critical reflective approach to issues around sex and sexuality would generate similar dilemmas and inequalities to be voiced by other young people. I feel it is essential to acknowledge the limitations and possibilities these gender issues present. For example, discussions could consider the pressures young men can feel to perform to masculine standards, or the negative repercussions young women experience with almost any admission of sexual desire or behaviour (Holland & Thompson, 2010). This approach to 'problematising' gender inequality would hopefully disrupt the silent and insidious hold it has on adolescent (and consequently, adult) behaviour (Jackson & Weatherall, 2010). Rogrow and Haberland (2005) make the point that teaching young people about condom use is futile without exploration, and critical reflection, on the way their ability to actually carry out the action may be impeded by issues of gender. For example, female embarrassment and shame may prevent purchase, or male fear of loss of erection may prevent use (Costa, 1998). Exploring the discourses that inhibit or ratify behaviour would also problematise the 'sex as technology of self' discourse featured in this analysis, whereby the

social status motivations underlying intimate relationships could be critically explored and rendered less compelling (Harris, 2005; Moore, 2011).

4.4.3 Implications for Institutional Practices, Service Provision and the Profession of Clinical Psychology.

This thesis adds to the existing literature that problematises the pedagogy on which SRE programmes are based. A critical evaluation of the 'empowerment' model, that is delivered within a moral conservative discourse would make transparent the moral assumptions such a model makes when it propagates 'right' versus 'wrong' choices. Alldred and David (2007) have noted the tensions that emerge from SRE situated within an assessment and achievement curriculum of school. The messages of neo-liberal subject and non-sexual innocent that are simultaneously propagated within school settings have merged to position sex as a tool. The embodied experience is lost which has significant implications for pleasure and safety; it is argued these two are not mutually exclusive (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Allen, 2005) and are based on the idea that if young people know their own sexual desires, they will be able to recognise when an experience or sexual encounter is not what they want (Ingham, 2005).

The current service provision of SRE homogenises the whole population into one 'adolescent youth', who are either out of control or innocent and thus require regulation or protection. The diversity of young people and their lives must be recognised in order to acknowledge young people as sexual subjects with agency. Prioritising pregnancy prevention privileges heterosexuality and the power imbalances inherent within that. The inequality between young men and women was highlighted and is a key area of concern for psychologists. The current construction of SRE positions young women as at risk, as the embodied receptacle of 'negative consequence' of sex, and, therefore, as responsible. The message from SRE to 'protect' is protection against a female 'problem'. Gendered discourses of sexuality that position females as either dangerous or at-risk continue to dominate. Female sexuality is heavily regulated by peer groups sustained by a discourse of 'responsible' enterprising young women versus irresponsible welfare-destined young women. This has implications for the subject positions young women are able to occupy in order to become

empowered to effect change in their own lived experience, whether it be in sexual situations or otherwise.

4.4.4 Practical Implications for Clinical Psychology

The practical implications that this research highlights fall into two areas which are explored below.

One: Governmentality of Girls

This thesis adds to the extensive existing literature on what McRobbie (2000: 1) names the 'governmentality of girls', stating: *"Girls", including their bodies, their labour power, and their social behaviour are now the subject of governmentality to an unprecedented degree*'. It is suggested that as female roles in consumption and production have become crucial to modern economies, females are governed not only through victimisation, violence and individual morality (Fine, 1998) but also through 'self as enterprise' discourse (McNay, 2012; Nash, 1997). This thesis explicates the consequence of tensions between such discourses, as experienced through the conduit of sex education. The effects on young women of teaching practices that ignore structural and societal inequality (Lazzarto, 2009), and that deny young women the opportunity to occupy positive sexual subjectivities that are valid and agentic, prevents acknowledgement of female agency and thus undermines safety in sexual situations (Allen, 2007; Jackson, 2010; Kehily, 2004). By adding to the literature problematizing this issue within clinical psychology, it is hoped that further strength will be added to the voices asking for a sexuality education that promotes genuinely liberal ideas as opposed to a neo-liberal policy that serves to ignore or vilify female subjectivity (McNay, 2012; Allen, 2007; Jackson & Weatherall, 2010; Harris, 2005). Autonomy over one's existence and agency to make changes in one's life are strong predictors of positive sense of self and psychological wellbeing (Fullagar, 2005). Constructing young people as autonomous subjects with agency will enable them to take control and ownership of their experience, their bodies and their lives.

Two: Sexual Health of Young Men and Women: Call For Complexity

Helping young people mature into sexually healthy adults is the primary aim of SRE. However, the assumptions present in current sexuality education

discourses, combined with wider neo-liberal messages inherent in education and society that promote visible productivity and success, combine to construct sex as a tool with which to achieve social success and power. Knowledge of sex as an embodied experience is reduced to the consequence of sex (i.e. pregnancy) rather than knowledges of desire and intimacy. There must be a balance between responsibility to protect oneself and others, *and* the ability to express oneself sexually (Berne and Huberman, 1999). This has implications for sexual health of young people for whom sex is functional and transformative as a technology of self to achieve maturity, and as a method of gaining knowledge of sex and sexuality through sexual intercourse. The sexual health of young people is a significant concern in today's society, however, 'health' is constructed as the absence of disease or risk (Allen, 2004). This thesis argues for the conception of sexual 'health' to be more truthfully aligned with the WHO (2002) conceptualisation listed in the introduction chapter. WHO definition of sexual health argues for '*emotional, mental and social well-being related to sexuality... which requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality*'. This thesis argues that in order for young people to develop positive and respectful approach to their own, and others', sexuality, they must be able to embody sexual subjectivities in a knowing way, that acknowledges the complexities of sexual experience. For this to occur, the complexities associated with sexual experience must be acknowledged by those people in positions of power who govern the 'knowledges' offered to young people through the conduit of SRE. By accepting that there is a range of diverse sexual subjectivities available to young men and women, they can hopefully use the public health and SRE messages about 'safe' sex, in order to navigate such experiences in a safe and healthy way that results in emotional, mental and social wellbeing.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL APPROVAL

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY
Dean: Professor Mark N. O. Davies, PhD, CPsychol, CBiol.
uel.ac.uk/psychology



Doctoral Degree in Clinical Psychology
Direct Fax: 0208 223 4967

June 2011

Name of Student	Stephanie Murphy
Title of Research Project	Encountering sex education and imagining positive sex: A discursive exploration of young peoples' accounts

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that the above named student is conducting research as part of the requirements for the Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology. The Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology, University of East London has approved their proposal and they are, therefore, covered by the University's indemnity insurance policy. This policy should normally cover for any untoward event provided that the experimental programme has been approved by the Ethics Committee prior to its commencement. The University does not offer "no fault" cover, so in the event of untoward event leading to a claim against the institution, the claimant would be obliged to bring an action against the University and seek compensation through the courts.

As the above named is a student of UEL the University will act as the sponsor of their research. UEL will also fund expenses arising from the research, such as photocopying and postage.

Yours faithfully,

Kenneth Gannon PhD
Research Director

Dr Martyn Baker 020 8223 4411 M.C.Baker@uel.ac.uk
Dr Maria Castro 020 8223 4422 M.Castro@uel.ac.uk
Dr Sarah Davidson 020 8223 4554 S.Davidson@uel.ac.uk
Dr Kenneth Gannon 020 8223 4576 K.N.Gannon@uel.ac.uk
Dr David Harper 020 8223 4021 D.Harper@uel.ac.uk
Dr M Jones Chesters 020 8223 4603 m.h.jones-chesters@uel.ac.uk
Dr Paula Magee 020 8223 4414 p.j.magee@uel.ac.uk

Dr Nimisha Patel 020 8223 4413 N.Patel@uel.ac.uk
Prof Mark Rapley 020 8223 6592 m.rapley@uel.ac.uk
Dr Noli Rees 020 8223 4475 N.Rees@uel.ac.uk
Dr Rachel Smith 020 8223 4423 r.a.smith@uel.ac.uk
Dr Robyn Vesey 020 8223 4408 r.vesey@uel.ac.uk
Ruth Wacholder 020 8223 4408 r.wacholder@uel.ac.uk
Administrators 020 8223 4174/4557 c.widdham@uel.ac.uk / j.chapman@uel.ac.uk

Stratford Campus, Water Lane, Stratford, London E15 4LZ
Tel: +44 (0)20 8223 4966 Fax: +44 (0)20 8223 4937 MINICOM 020 8223 2858
Email: mno.davies@uel.ac.uk



APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Introductions....

Just to remind you, this study is about....

Ground rules are.....

.....

What are your experiences of sex ed so far:

What sexual health education have you had so far in school?
(Prompt, in which lessons [biology, citizenship??])

What did you think of the sex ed that you've had?

What was good?

What's missing? (are you expecting this to be taught in the future?)

Where else have you learnt about sex and relationships? (home, clinics, internet??)

.....

Sean is 14 and about to go into a sex education lesson.

What type of things will he expect to hear about?

What type of things will he already know about?

What type of things would he WANT to hear about instead?

So, we've talked about the things that a teenager might need to know or want to know about sex and relationships.....

what should be the AIM of sex education do you think?

Mina and Layth have been going out for a while and are thinking of having sex with each other.

What do you think they might be looking forward to?

What do you think they might be worried about?

What do you think would be good about being in a sexual relationship?

What might be less good about being in a sexual relationship?

What counts as a 'good relationship' for Mina and Layth? Would it be the same for both of them?

What counts as 'good sex' for Mina and Layth? Would it be the same for both of them?

How do you think they would feel about being in a sexual relationship?

What might their friends and family think?

[Could move on to questions such as:]

What do adults think about teenagers having sex?

What messages are in TV programmes about young people's sexuality? What do you think of these?

Are there pressures on young people? What are these?

How old should young people be before they start having sex?

Ben really wants to have sex with Adeola

Why do you think this is?

Is he looking forward to different things to Layth?

Is he worried about different things to Layth?

Adeola really wants to have sex with Ben.

Why do you think this is?

Is she looking forward to different things to Mina?

Is she worried about different things to Mina?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

Confidentiality and right of withdrawal etc

Aims of research (brief re-cap)

How did you find talking about issues of sex and sexuality in the focus group? Did you find anything particularly interesting – embarrassing or difficult to talk about etc?

Is that similar or different to how you find talking about these things in group sex education lessons?

What sexual health education have you had so far in school?

What did you think of the sex ed that you've had?

What was good?

What's not so good and is there anything you think might be missing? (are you expecting this to be taught in the future?)

How did sex education lessons make you feel about your "emerging sexuality"?

In what ways do you think sex education lessons leave you feeling prepared for sexual activity? In what ways do you think it hasn't?

Why do you think sex education is taught in the way it is?

What should be the AIM or purpose of sex education do you think?

Where else have you learnt about sex and relationships? (home, clinics, internet?)

Mina and Layth are fourteen years old and have been going out for a while and are thinking of having sex with each other.

What do you think are the kinds of things they might be looking forward to? And why

What do you think they might be worried about?

What do you think might count as a 'good relationship' for Mina and Layth? Would it be the same for both of them do you think?

What do you think might count as ‘good sex’ for Mina and Layth? Would it be the same for both of them do you think?

How do you think they might feel about being in a sexual relationship?

How would they know they want to be in a sexual relationship?

What might their friends and family think about them being in a sexual relationship?

From the focus groups a lot of discussion focused on pressures; do you feel the young people are pressured?

Is it different for boys and girls do you think?

Would young people want different sex education for young men and young women?

What would be important for each gender to know?

What would be important for everyone to know?

What do you think adults think about teenagers having sex?

What messages are in TV programmes about young people and sex? What do you think of these?

How old should young people be before they start having sex do you think? Why?

From the focus groups, it sounded like a adolescent sexuality/young people and sex seems to be “hidden” from adults / parents / teachers .

However, young people themselves are constantly surrounded by sex, talking about it, thinking about it and possibly even engaging in sexual activities.

Is this the case from what you know or have heard?

Why is adolescent sexuality hidden do you think?

Who do you think benefits from it being hidden?

Would it be better to be more open with adults?

What would the benefits of that be?

How could that happen?

How do you feel about your emerging sexuality/having sex at your age?

What are YOUR expectations for sex and sexual experience if you have any?

Positive expectations?

Negative expectations?

What about expectations of a relationship in general?

How was talking 1:1 about these issues?

What was different / worse / better than focus groups?

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX D: ADVICE RESOURCE SHEET

We can recommend a couple of other websites you might be interested in:

Sexperience (link to <http://sexperienceuk.channel4.com>) or

TheSite.org (link to <http://www.thesite.org>)

If you need specific advice, these links may be useful:

Pregnancy, family planning and sexually transmitted infections:

Find a clinic near you:

<http://www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearchAdditional.aspx?ServiceType=SexualHealthService>

Brook: Provides free and confidential sexual health services and advice for young people. 0808 802 1234; <http://www.brook.org.uk>

Terrence Higgins Trust: Info on sex and sexual health <http://www.tht.org.uk/>

Sexual assault and abuse:

ChildLine: A counselling service for children and young people. 0800 1111.

Calls are free and confidential.

<http://www.childline.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre: National Freephone Helpline 0808 802 9999; <http://rasasc.bizview.co.uk/>

The Hideout: Helps young people experiencing domestic abuse.

<http://www.thehideout.org.uk/over10/default.aspa>

Stress and depression:

Young minds: Offers information to young people about mental health and emotional well-being. <http://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-people>

Confidential emotional support <http://www.samaritans.org> or <http://www.supportline.org.uk>

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans:

PACE: Promotes lesbian and gay health and well-being.

<http://www.pacehealth.org.uk/>

(<http://www.girldiva.org.uk/>; <http://www.outzone.org/>)

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard: 020 7837 7324 <http://www.llgs.org.uk/>

Mermaids: support for teenagers with gender identity issues

<http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/index.html>

APPENDIX E: GROUND RULES EXAMPLES

GROUND RULES DEVELOPED COLLABORATIVELY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Confidentiality – not sharing information that we discuss here today.

Not using phone throughout sessions.

Not discussing the subject matter again outside of the group.

Respecting people's opinions, even if you don't agree with them.

Feeling okay to just listen.

Feeling okay to contribute knowing it is a 'safe' space

APPENDIX F: INFORMATION SHEET

SEX EDUCATION STUDY

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to understand what young people think about **ideas of sex and sexuality**. This study is interested in hearing young peoples' accounts of their expectations of sex and their emerging sexuality. It is important to hear how young people are making sense of the information they are exposed to on this topic. This will help improve understanding about what is, and is not, helpful to young people.

The study will examine how sexuality in young people is understood by the school system and wider society as a whole. Research has found that UK understanding of young people and sex is likely to be conceptualised as "problematic" and "risky". This study will consider how these conceptualisations impact on young peoples' understandings of themselves as developing sexual beings, and how that influences their sexual behaviour.

This study is particularly interested in exploring accounts of sexuality that include pleasure, desire, sexual intimacy and reciprocity. These are considered essential to attain sexual well-being, yet appear to be neglected topics in formal sex and relationship education settings. This study is hoping to understand sexuality from the young persons' perspective, and whether the current sex and relationship education is addressing all of the young persons' needs.

Why have I been invited to take part?

Your school has agreed to participate in this research project. As a result, those people in Year Nine who have received at least six months Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) are being given the opportunity to participate if they wish, and if their guardian/parent has agreed.

Do I have to take part?

It is completely your decision if you take part in the study or not. If you do decide to take part I will ask you to sign a consent form to say you have agreed to take part. **However you are free to withdraw at any time, and you will not be asked to give any reason.**

What will happen if I take part?

- You will be asked to read and sign a consent form.
- You will then take part in either a group discussion between you and some of your classmates or you can have a one to one interview with the researcher. Each of these will last about one hour.
- It is your choice which you participate in, you can always participate in both if you decide to at a later date.
- The group discussion and the one to one interview will both be informal conversations.
- I will have some questions or topics that I would like to discuss and will raise these throughout, but the sessions are primarily led by you as the participant(s).
- It is essential for the research that you are able to be as free as you want when talking about the issues that are important to you.
- **However I am only interested in what you *think* about sex, I will not be asking about any sexual experiences that you may or may not have had.**

In both situations, the conversations will be recorded by me, the researcher. These recordings are completely confidential and will only be listened to by me. After the session I will type up

the recordings, and make them anonymous so that you will not be identifiable to anyone except myself in order to maintain your confidentiality.

In the group situation it will be made clear that the conversations are confidential and I will obtain everybody's agreement on this before we proceed, however obviously this can not be guaranteed. We will have a few case examples from fictional teenagers, you will be required to discuss what you think is going on for the fictional character and why etc. **That way you will not be disclosing anything personal about yourself if you do not want to.** If you and some of your friends all have your guardians' permission to participate and want to do the group session together, please let me know and we will try to accommodate that.

What are the possible disadvantages and advantages of taking part?

It is not thought that there will be any disadvantage associated with taking part in this research. The advantages of taking part are that you will be providing information that could help to increase the understanding of what young people feel is important to know about their developing sexualities. It is hoped that your contribution will help this research to shed light on how young people come to understand themselves sexually and the impact that has on their behaviour.

Will my confidentiality be respected?

Your participation will be kept confidential. All material will be stored in a locked cabinet. Any information identifying you (i.e. consent form) will be stored separately from the typed copy of your interview. Comments that you make in the interview will be used in the write up of the research however all identifying information (names and places) will be removed. The recording of your interview and the transcript will be kept in a locked cupboard. The recording will be destroyed at the end of the research. Transcripts will be destroyed after 5 years. Only the researcher, supervisor of the project and examiners will have access to the tapes and transcripts. Your participation in the research will remain anonymous. Only the researcher will know the identity of those involved.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the study will be written up and submitted as a research project as part of a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology. It is hoped that the results might also be published in a relevant journal, although participants will not be identified in any way. If you choose to take part and would like to receive a summary of the results, please indicate this on your consent form and this will be sent to you in the post when the research is complete.

Has the research obtained ethical approval?

The research has obtained ethical approval from the University of East London's Ethics Committee.

Contact for further information:

If you would like to take part in this study or you have any questions or please contact Stephanie Murphy via email at: u0933892@UEL-Exchange.uel.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

APPENDIX G: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS

S. M. Murphy
Trainee Clinical Psychologist
University of East London
Stratford Campus
Water Lane
E15 4LZ

Dear Parent / Guardian / Carer,

RE: Sex education study at _____ School

I am a Trainee Clinical Psychologist studying for my professional doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of East London. The three year doctorate is sponsored by the NHS. I am writing to ask your permission to give your child the opportunity to participate in a research project.

Project Details

The aim of this study is to understand what young people between the ages of thirteen and fourteen think about the sex education they receive at school and their ideas about, and expectations of, sex and sexuality. It is important to hear how young people are making sense of the information they receive in sex education, and about sex and sexuality more broadly. This will help improve understanding about what is, and is not, helpful to young people and about how sex education is best presented to them.

Research shows that those people who are able to develop a positive sexual identity are much more able to navigate sexual encounters safely. As this is the main aim of sex education, it has become essential to hear the young peoples' opinions and understandings of their developing identities, in order to identify what is helpful to them in reaching this aim.

What's involved?

Young people who want to take part will be placed into small groups of between four and six young people, with myself as group facilitator. Alternatively, your child can choose to have a one-to-one interview with me if he/she would prefer. Your child will not be asked to be involved in both a discussion group and interview, unless they specifically want to. The group discussion and the one-to-one interview will be like informal conversations.

However I am only interested in what the young people think about sex, I will not be asking about any sexual experiences that they may or may not have had. In order to ensure this I will be using an imagined case study of a made-up person that the young people can talk about.

Confidentiality

Discussion groups and interviews will be recorded by me, the researcher. These recordings will be completely **confidential** and will only be listened to by me. After the session I will type up the recordings and make the transcripts **anonymous** so that participants will not be identifiable. This will include the anonymisation of your child's identity and the identity of anyone that they may mention during the discussion group or interview. Names of participants and their personal details will be kept in a secure filing cabinet that only I will have access to. Similarly, the audio recordings of discussion groups and interviews will be stored as a secure, access only computer file. Audio recordings will be destroyed after the research is completed. The only circumstance in which confidentiality could be breached is under the child protection obligations of the 'Working

Together to Safeguard Children' legislation, if it becomes known that the health, safety or welfare of a child under 18 is at grave risk.

Right to withdraw

Your child can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation or consequences. As can you as parent / carer / guardian. It is important that your child should not feel under any pressure to be involved.

Has the research obtained ethical approval?

The research has obtained ethical approval from the University of East London's Research Ethics Committee. _____ School and _____, Head Teacher, have agreed to the research being conducted and has approved the ethical procedure.

Contact for further information:

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me, Stephanie Murphy via email at: u0933892@UEL-Exchange.uel.ac.uk or on telephone number: 07956 526 398.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

--

PARENT/GUARDIAN/CARER PERMISSION SLIP

Sex education research study

Please sign the permission slip below and return it to _____, Head of SRE, at _____ school as soon as possible if your child would like to take part in the study.

I agree to allow my son / daughter: _____ to participate in the study on developing a positive sexual identity within a school sex education programme.

Please tick in the boxes if you agree:

I have read and understood the information sheet and understand what the study entails.

☐

I understand that my child and I are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without consequence.

☐

I understand that my child and family are guaranteed anonymity.

☐

I give my consent for my child to participate in this study.

☐

Parent / Guardian / Carer signature:

Date:

Child's birth date:

APPENDIX H: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

ENCOUNTERING SEX EDUCATION & IMAGINING POSITIVE SEX: A DISCURSIVE EXPLORATION OF YOUNG PEOPLES' ACCOUNTS

Name of Researcher: Stephanie Murphy

The Information Sheet outlines information about the confidentiality and the anonymity of your interview. You should have read it carefully. If you do not understand something then please ask the researcher.

In order for you to participate in the research you will need to sign this form to give your consent. You can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason.

Please sign all the points below in the boxes provided and sign, name and date the form:

I have read and understood the information sheet about this study
and understand what the study entails

I understand that I am free to withdraw from
the study at any time, without giving a reason

I agree to participate in this study.

Participant:

Signed: Name: Date:

Person taking consent:

Signed: Name: Date:

NB: This Consent form will be stored separately from the responses you provide.

If you would like to receive a summary of the research findings by post after the research is completed please tick ☐ and provide a name and address for this purpose.

Name & Address:

APPENDIX I: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

ENCOUNTERING SEX EDUCATION & IMAGINING POSITIVE SEX: A DISCURSIVE EXPLORATION OF YOUNG PEOPLES' ACCOUNTS

Name	
Age	
Ethnicity	
Religious Affiliation (if any)	
Who lives in your house?	
Who goes to work in your house?	
Parents / Caregivers profession	Professional Unskilled Manual Skilled Manual Clerical Staff Specialist Skilled

APPENDIX J – LETTER TO FORM TUTORS



Dear Year Nine Form Tutor,

Thank you for distributing these letters to your form, it is much appreciated.

Can you please tell the young people that the letters are about a research study I will be conducting at your school about what young people in year nine think about certain issues around sex and sexuality.

The letters are to request their parents' consent to allow the young people to participate.

If you could also ask your pupils to return the forms as soon as possible as we are hoping to complete the focus groups before the end of term. Many thanks for passing on this message.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me. Ms. _____, Head of SRE, has my details.

With kindest regards,

Stephanie Murphy
Trainee Clinical Psychologist

APPENDIX K: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Formal transcription conventions such as those suggested by Jefferson (1985) were not applied in this analysis. This research was focused on macro level discourse concerned with global discursive resources. The conventions used draw on Potter and Wetherell (1987).that were further outlined by Malson (1998) were used.

Interviews were transcribed and reported in the analysis verbatim. However I did use conventional punctuation to render the extracts legible and facilitate reading.

... three lines were used to denote a pause in speech.

Full stops were used to denote extended pauses.

[] Square brackets were used to provide [clarifying information’].

Brief interruptions were not denoted, in

Extracts were numbered in the order they appear in the analysis and discussion session. Participant pseudonym and line numbers were also provided in the analysis section .

APPENDIX L: PROCESS OF ANALYSIS

Step 1

Following each interview conducted, I made brief notes on the interview process, implementation, and ideas for themes in my reflexive journal. During analysis and write up, I returned to these notes for accurate reflection.

Step 2

I reproduced my interview transcripts as tables and printed them off. The table consisted of columns where I could enter my own comments and ideas on constructions, practices, and subject positions during reading. I then block coloured the relevant text to highlight constructions of SRE, sex, sexuality, young people, and of wider systems and institutions. A number of different questions drawn from Parker (1992) and Potter and Wetherell (1987) were used to analyse the data. The following is a list of the questions used:

- What objects/events/experiences are referred to?
- What kinds of objects/events/experiences are constructed?
- What kinds of identities are created?
- What is made possible in terms of subject positions by these constructions?
- What can/cannot be said in the discourse?
- What are the contradictions? How do they constitute different objects?
- How do discourse constitute the 'same' object in different ways?
- Which institutions are reinforced/attacked when a discourse is used?
- Who gains and loses from employment of the discourse?
- What possibilities for action are there?
- What sorts of power relations are made possible?
- How does the discourse connect with others?

Step 3

As part of each interview analysis process, I created lists of ideas for constructions and 'mapped' these ideas out; that is linked the ideas with arrows that were related, to help highlight the relevance of one idea to another. Further to this, I also made notes of ideas for overall constructions, with particular attention paid to constructions of SRE, sex, sexuality, young people, and of wider systems and institutions. Additionality was given by linking secondary research questions around social practices and actions warranted by these constructions.

Step 4

The notes I made up were then compared with the transcripts of the interviews with additional elaboration where it was thought necessary. A list of key constructions was then made with these notes and further notes on the presentation of these constructions presented within the text by participants. This also included contradictory accounts and/or challenges to them.

Step 5

The next step was to decide on which constructions were to be included or excluded based on how they were constructed by the participant within the text, and whether or not they were supported by further evidence of extracts within and between interviews. And in this was could be said to be representative of and comprising constructions of SRE, sex, sexuality, young people, and of wider systems and institutions. Extracts were judged as to whether they may or may not exemplify this.

Step 6

At this stage, some coherence was being established within my analysis, whereby I was choosing specific extracts which demonstrated the key constructions or parts of and linking them together in such a way to help provide a narrative of how SRE, sex, sexuality, young people, and wider systems and institutions were constructed. As an initial process I mapped these constructs out along with arrows linking the ideas to help identify inter related areas and explicating their effects.

Step 7

At step 7, I started to write up my analysis using the map diagrams to help elaborate key constructions and illustrate their effects through chosen extracts. Further to this, I started to link these constructs with relevant literature, where appropriate.

Step 8

During step 8, the analysis was refined to make a coherent dialogue with constructions either integrated or separated where appropriate. Once this was done I took the decision to stop analysing due to time constraints, but also having reached a coherent, informative stage, and having answered the research questions posed.

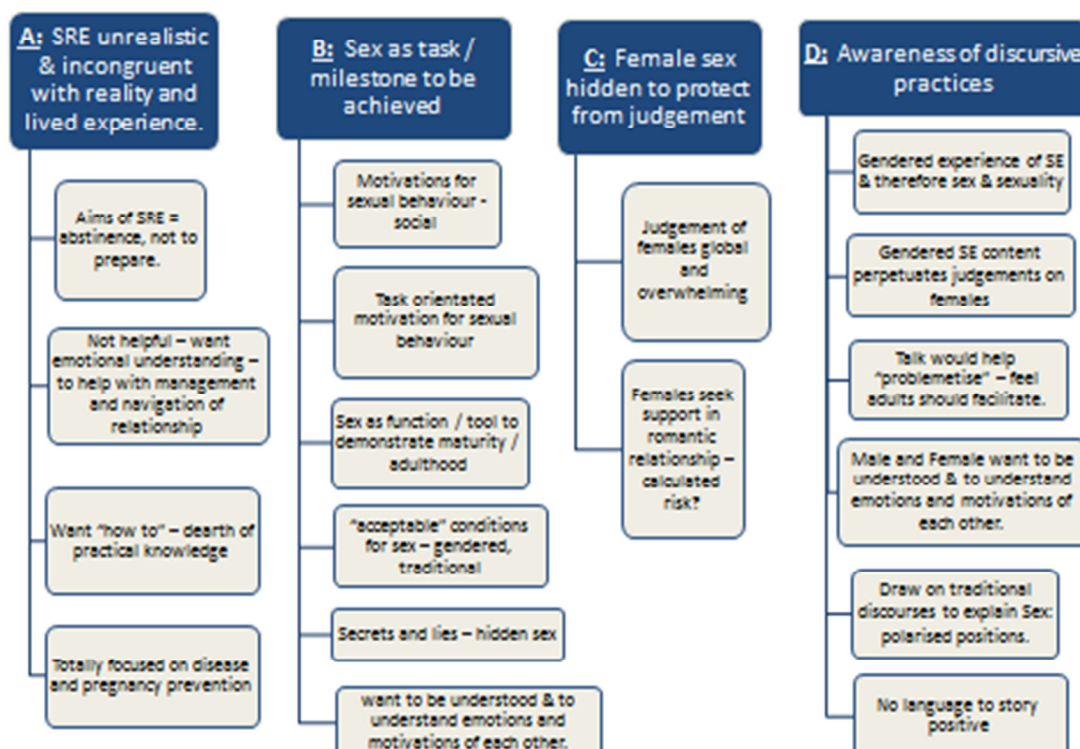
APPENDIX M: FOCUS GROUP THEMES

All Three Focus Groups	
Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adult responsibility to facilitate discussion - Adults hold knowledge and power - Parents influence young people's opinions - Teachers & parents unapproachable due to 'awkwardness' - Adults sanction space & speech re: teen sex = hard to talk to them. - Adults promote anti-sex
Body Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Body confidence related to promiscuity - Negative and positive correlations between body confidence and promiscuity.
Gender Difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Acceptable' female sex – age, length of relationship, financially secure, educationally secure. - Inequality between males and females. - Female's keeping sex secret from one another. - Female friendship groups 'dangerous' spaces to discuss issues of sex. - Difference between male & female sex education content – they each need different. - Adult silence is to protect children.
SRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fear tactics - Awareness of fear tactics makes it irrelevant - Missing information about developing body. - Missing information about act of sex - Missing information about relationships - If it was more balanced it would mean YP more prepared. - SRE aim to deter, not prepare. - Females more comfortable without males. - SRE starts too late. - SRE - safety protection prevention - SRE = disease & preg prevention - SRE ambivalent re: success - SRE consequences of sex - SRE contraception heavy - SRE didactic / proscriptive - SRE evangelical - SRE family - SRE formal, decontextualised, religious - SRE from friends - SRE from friends inferior - SRE positive re: contraception - SRE silent voices

Recommendations for SRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Separate genders for specific teaching - Females: 'males should learn about impact of name-calling' - Males: 'learn more about act of sex and what to do' - Mixed: 'need more on relationships, practicalities of contraception and act of sex' - 'open dialogue' between children and adults and between adolescents = makes the act of sex less desirable / more normal - open dialogue = less fear of social consequences of sex - open dialogue = less judgement
Friendship Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Within group competition for males - Female friendship groups unsafe. - 'Confidant' Friend versus Mate - Friendship groups influence behaviour of YP re: sex.
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Female family judgement - Influence of parental style on behaviour of child: 'good' parenting = delayed sexual activity; 'bad' parenting = early sexual activity. - Parental fear of sex due to pregnancy - Parental prevention pushes sex 'outside' - Parents block relationships – causes secret relationships. - Father & Son' = dad proud of son - 'daughters' = serious repercussions to sex in terms of punishment and family disappointment.
Desire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of language to 'story' desire. - Desire mixed up with perceived benefits of engaging in sexual activity. - Female desire dependent on commitment - Female desire dependent on trust / contract - Female desire deterred by social judgement
Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Good' Sex = couple dyad - Good sex = consensual and equal desire - Good sex = couple dyad & committed - Good sex = increased love - Hidden sex = from parents (all YP) - Hidden sex = from peers (females only) - Female Sex = balancing act between bad reputation and 'getting the boy' - Perception that males have more knowledge and power - Male Sex = power & glory – positive reputation. - Sex route to adulthood? - No physical spaces for sex - Inequality of knowledge = adults & children - Inequality of knowledge = male & female

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sex = approval - sex = functional - sex = idea of positive - sex = knowledge of bond - sex = relief / milestone / socially accepted - sex = social currency - sex = pregnancy
Secrecy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Secret sex' = children hide from adults - 'Secret sex' = adults hide from children - 'Secret sex' = females hide from friends - 'Secret sex' = males reveal secrets - Mistrust between friends - Secrecy required due to 'real' effect of knowledge re: sex being shared. - Secrecy = any information more potent? - 'Sanctioned Speech' in school – from teachers and peers.
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Media = teen sex bad - Media deters young people from having sex - Media encourages young people - TV shows re: sex ed give more relevant information - TV shows re: sex ed good template for SRE - 'Soaps' provided lots of information re: 'appropriate' behaviour - Teen soaps (O.C., Hollyoaks, Gossip Girl) promote 'fun' sex - Media shapes parents views – scares them.
Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Associated with sex - Perceived as inevitable outcome for YP, parents and teachers. - Pregnancy caused by lack of SRE - Pregnancy – female responsibility - sex = preg = economic dependency - sex = preg = end of education - sex = preg = no education / future
Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Female report pressure from males - Males report pressure on females from males - Males report indirect pressure to have sex from peers - Female pressure to behave in 'right' way by female friends - Female pressure constantly fluctuating

APPENDIX N: INITIAL CONSTRUCTIONS



CONSTRUCTION A: DISTANCE

Talking about distance – young people feel distanced from:

- Sex
- Sexuality
- Full knowledge of selves and each other
- Adult knowledge
- Recognition of what they’re becoming
- Their own SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Feel distanced through:

- Scare tactics
- Negative bias

They recognise their own distance from full practical knowledge of themselves & each other.
This section seems to demonstrate their acts of resistance.

CONSTRUCTION B: RECONNECT

Ways in which the young people IMAGINE it would feel to be re-connected and not so distanced from the above:

- Task – function demonstrating maturity

- Male – social currency, masculinity and power
- Female – safety, feeling liked, making them legitimate & feel worthwhile.

Their imaginings are very gendered, which they recognise:

- Task of reconnection very gendered
- Lived experience of this – conflict, risky, problematic

Reconnection is described through discourses of “closeness”, “maturity” manliness, safety, validation.

CONSTRUCTION C: BARRIERS TO RECONNECTION

Highlighting and explaining of the discursive practices.

They’re aware that there is something that they want = think “talk” is the way.

- They seem to have some meta-awareness that ‘discourses’ / discursive practices are constraining.
- That they limit their behaviour.
- That they result in punitive action – ruin reputations. Etc.

CONSTRUCTION D: CALL FOR COMPLEXITY

Implications – subjectification of young people in SRE discourse is not workable.

Subject positioning is:

- Gendered
- Protective / Innocent

Meaning they’re not capable of full and proper knowledge as need to be protected and innocent.

- Implications for safety and awareness of self and developing identity.

APPENDIX O: ADDITIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS: EXAMPLE EXTRACTS

The following is an extract of talk from Ethan, describing his feeling that issues of sex must be kept hidden from teachers, even during sex education lessons:

- E: It's [focus group method] more like a tutorial instead of having to write it all down and remember it
- SM: In normal lessons do you have to write stuff down?
- E: Yeah you have to write it down in your book
- SM: And you feel that is not quite so helpful?
- E: Yeah, cos everyone gets to read it as well, the teachers
- SM: And how do you feel about that?
- E: It's a bit too like, in your face, like they're watching what you're doing so you don't want to write some things in case they get the wrong end of the stick, and think it's something different to what it means
(Ethan, 69-79)

The next extract of talk is from Guy, describing his perception that to discuss issues of sex with parents would be dangerous and could only be safe with a third party involved:

- SM: And would it be better to be more open with adults, do you think?
Or is it okay the way it is?
- G: It would be better to be more open with adults but the kids are just too afraid of what will happen to them.
- SM: So why would it be better, then, to keep it open with adults?
- G: Because then with your dad you can go into more sexual stuff because your mums, sometimes they just reject you and don't want to talk to you. But sometimes your dads can also give you great advice.
- SM: Okay, so sometimes your dad can give you great advice... but you're scared because you think...?
- G: He might go mad at you.
- SM: So how could that happen then, that kids were more open with adults?
- G: Like getting them to a room and having a counsellor there and stuff like that.
- SM: Parents and kids couldn't just do it on their own?
- G: Because the parents might try and hit the kids, stuff like that.
- SM: Right, okay, if they start talking about sex?
- G: Yeah, say, like put them in like how you've got them prison cells when they speak on the phone; stuff like that.
- SM: Do you think you need that much protection just to talk about sex?
- G: Yeah, you might need that because when you have intimate detail and stuff like that, like you go to a place for about 2 weeks and talk about sex life; and to make sure that the parents don't try and kill the kids, they might just like have, send a cell phone to them and a glass window so they can't break it.

SM: You think you need that much protection to talk about sex with your mum and dad?

G: Yeah, because some parents can, when they find out, they might go ballistic.

(Guy, 1329-1372)

APPENDIX P: WORKED EXAMPLE OF ANALYSIS

564	SM: why more?			
565	H: because... I don't know really. It just comes across that way to most kids			
566	SM: so it seems like you can't really do anything without being called a slag really			
567	H: [laughing] not you actually can't [laughs]			
568	SM: so why do girls do it then? It seems like everyone gives them a really hard time, what			
569	motivates them to do it still			
570	H: it's probably if there's a boy in the situation really.	no sure why slag label applied motivation		
571	SM: because they really like the boy? and he wants to do it?	♂ is main motivation for ♀ & R	♀ motivation to ♂	
572	H: yeah and then like they don't really care about getting slated anyway after	forget consequences		
573	SM: and if people didn't slate them, would it be okay then to do those things, do you think more			
574	people would do it, or feel confident about doing it			
575	H: people would probably feel a lot more confident if they didn't get slated for it cos they wouldn't	if no slating = people more able to make choices for themselves		
576	feel judged by people so they could go out of their way to do what they want, and what they feel is			
577	right, than what everyone else feels is right.			
578	SM: okay so if girls didn't slate each other do you think more girls would be confident to say no			
579	H: probably yeah			
580	SM: do you think so? why is that?	increase of confidence to say no then allow other people to say no.	freedom of safety = confidence	
581	H: because it's just about people judging em and stuff like knowing that she would have stood up			
582	to him, would have made her feel more confident as a person, and everyone else would feel more			
583	confident to stand up to more boys knowing that she would have			
584	SM: but do people not generally talk about that?			
585	H: no			

APPENDIX Q: REFLEXIVE JOURNAL

EXAMPLE AFTER INTERVIEW WITH ANNA:

Feel like I am asking really essentialist questions – lots of whys, and making binary distinctions. Need to be careful that I don't reproduce gender differences. Should ask – can you tell me a bit more about that? What does that mean? Stuff like that.

Interview felt like I was asking all the questions – not much spontaneous talk from her. Need to reiterate my position as researcher next time. Be clear on 'safe and confidential space'.

Need to make sure I am checking what they mean by things – I am assuming 'knowledge' of their construction – have to get them to elaborate – what does that mean? What does that look like? If that happened what would that mean?

EXAMPLE AFTER FIRST READ THROUGH AND CODING:

This is a nightmare – I am basically just using words I think. Picking up on key words. Wrote research questions on big piece of paper and stuck to the wall in front of me. Sort of helping me to focus but I feel like I am doing a thematic analysis. Not sure if I should spend more time going back over reading for analysis in terms of Foucault's methods? But perhaps it will be more organic if I just go with the story.

EXAMPLE WHEN FINALISING THEMES TO WRITE UP:

All the themes are so important and interesting. Not sure which ones to explicate. Think that need to develop a coherent 'story' linking it together or should I go for 'difference' – not sure I am proficient enough with FDA to do that. Feel I am leaving so much unsaid and unexplored. Really need more time and space to go into the right amount of depth to really interrogate and understand what they're saying.